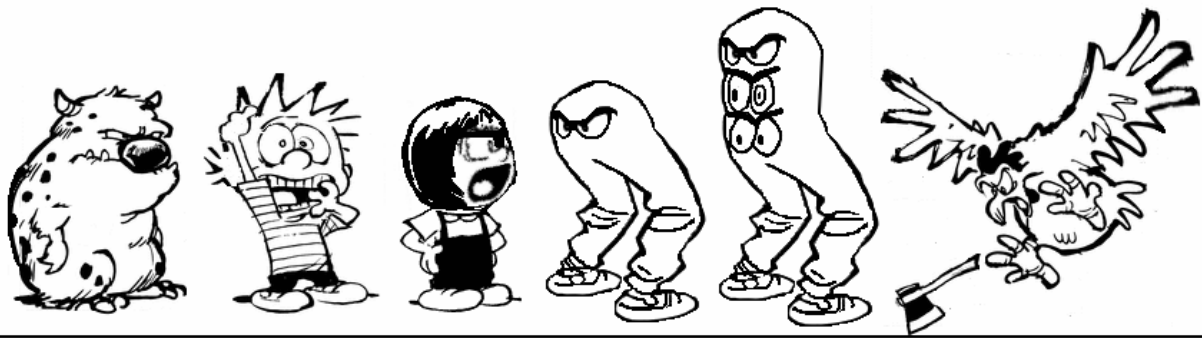


CALVIN THE ELDRITCH CULTIST

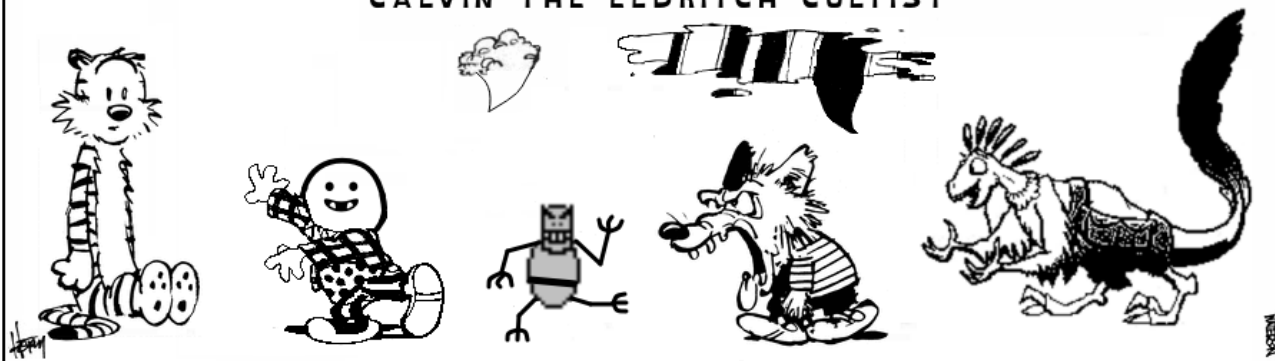


CALVIN THE ELDRITCH CULTIST



Chris Pirih

CALVIN THE ELDRITCH CULTIST



by

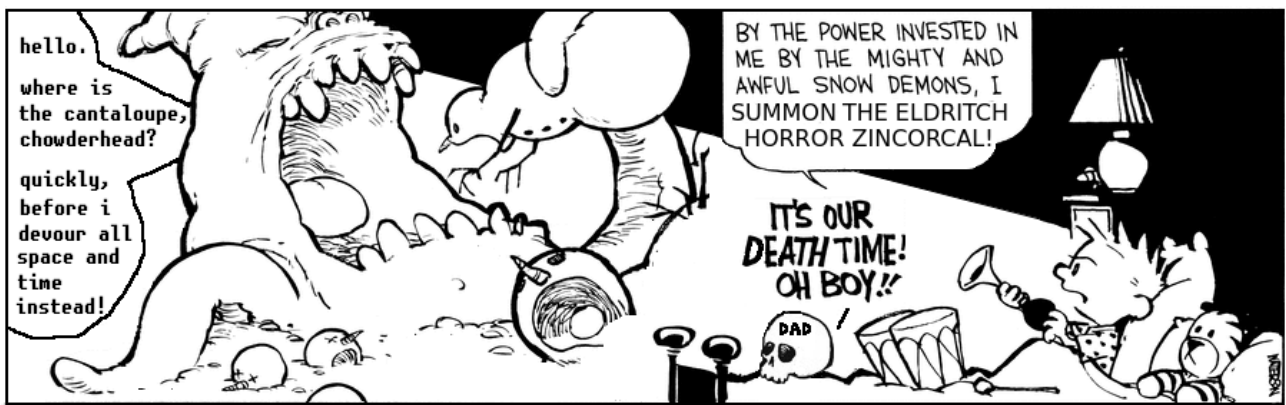
Episkopos Vorloth the Gridelin, Active Nihilist

2024-2025

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hello.
where is
the cantaloupe,
chowderhead?

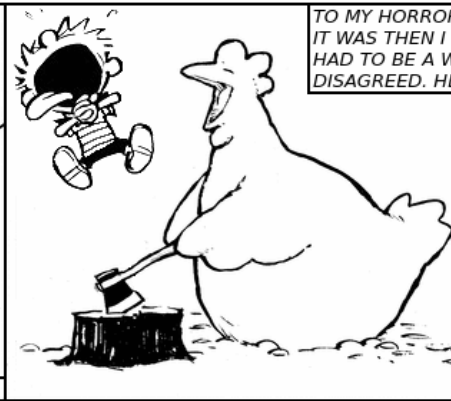
quickly,
before i
devour all
space and
time
instead!

BY THE POWER INVESTED IN
ME BY THE MIGHTY AND
AWFUL SNOW DEMONS, I
SUMMON THE ELDRITCH
HORROR ZINCORCAL!

IT'S OUR
DEATH TIME!
OH BOY!!



WHAT IF WE PRAY AND
IT TURNS OUT GOD IS
A BIG **CHICKEN** WITH
AN **AXE**?? WHAT THEN ??



TO MY HORROR, I SOON LEARNED THAT WAS TRUE.
IT WAS THEN I BEGAN MY OCCULT STUDIES. THERE
HAD TO BE A WAY TO ESCAPE THAT FATE. DAD
DISAGREED. HE WOULD HAVE TO BE DEALT WITH.

WE ARE ALL THE
PROPERTY OF THE HOLY
LUMBERCHICKEN!
HERESY! TO THE
DUNGEON WITH
YOU!

HOLY? ONLY IF YOU
PUT ANY STOCK IN
HIS CHICK TRACTS.



DUNGEON? BUT, DEAR, HE
IS STILL A CHILD! MERCY!

HE MUST LEARN!
I CAN ONLY
SPARE HIM SO
MUCH.

BUT...



DON'T "BUT" ME!

"ANK AWK BRAAU-
AUUKKK!"

THE LUMBERCHICKEN SPOKE,
AND MOM INSTANTLY SHIFTED
INTO AN ALIEN SHAPE.



HOW CRUEL THE GOD WAS.
MOM WAS NOW, IN DEFIANCE
OF BIOLOGY, A LIVING BUTT
WITH EYES AND LEGS. DAD
ORDERED HER INTO THE
DUNGEON WITH ME.



THBBPTHBPT!

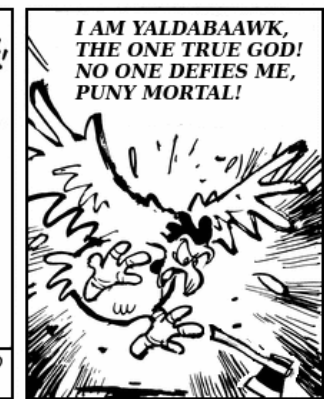
HER FART-SPEECH SOUNDED
LIKE "UNCLE MAX." WHAT WAS
THE REAL REASON I HADN'T
SEEN HIM IN YEARS?

NEITHER
WAS I.
DOUBT
WAS NO
CRIME.



DO YOUR WORST! C'MON.
LET'S SEE WHAT YOU'VE GOT!
YOU CAN'T CRUSH THE HUMAN
SPIRIT! ON BEHALF OF ALL
EARTHLY LIFE, I DEFY YOU!!

THE LUMBERCHICKEN REPLIED
IN A TERRIFYING VISION.



I AM YALDABAARK,
THE ONE TRUE GOD!
NO ONE DEFIES ME,
PUNY MORTAL!



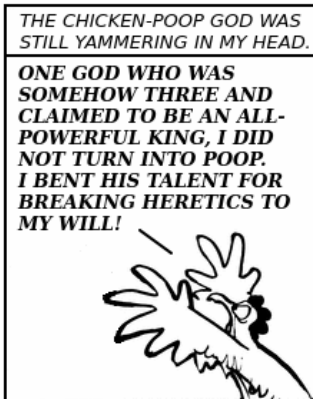
ALL THE GODS WHO
CLAIMED TO BE THE
ONLY GOD, I ATE AND
TURNED INTO POOP FOR
THEIR ARROGANCE!
ALL SO-CALLED MONO-
THEISMS ARE NOW MY
POOP! YOUR UNCLE MAX
IS ANOTHER'S POOP!



I HAD TO LEARN HOW UNCLE
MAX DIED. I WAS FAR FROM
THE ONLY ONE IN THIS
DUNGEON. SOMEONE ELSE
HAD TO KNOW SOMETHING.

AT LEAST I KNEW MORE OF MY
ENEMY. HE LIKED TO SAY
"POOP" WAY TOO MUCH.

POOP!!
ALL POOP!
POOP!!
POOP!!
POOP!!



THE CHICKEN-POOP GOD WAS
STILL YAMMERING IN MY HEAD.

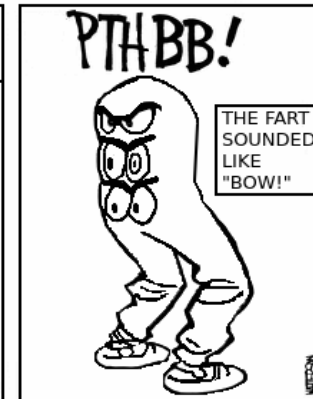
ONE GOD WHO WAS
SOMEHOW THREE AND
CLAIMED TO BE AN ALL-
POWERFUL KING, I DID
NOT TURN INTO POOP.
I BENT HIS TALENT FOR
BREAKING HERETICS TO
MY WILL!



PART OF ME WONDERED
WHEN HE'D SHUT UP, BUT I
STILL KEPT MY EARS OPEN.

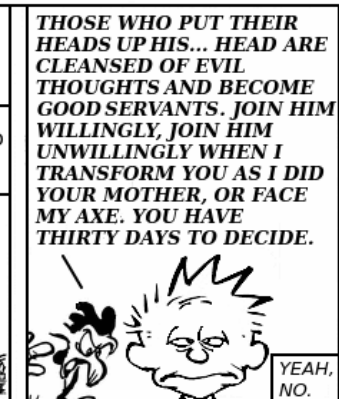
YOUR MOTHER KNEW
BETTER. YOU DO NOT. MY
PATIENCE HAS LIMITS.
THE TRIPLE GOD NOW
SERVES AS MY BUTT-
VICEROY, LEADING MY
BUTT-SERVANTS!

BEHOLD!



PTHBB!

THE FART
SOUNDED
LIKE
"BOW!"




THOSE WHO PUT THEIR
HEADS UP HIS... HEAD ARE
CLEANSED OF EVIL
THOUGHTS AND BECOME
GOOD SERVANTS. JOIN HIM
WILLINGLY, JOIN HIM
UNWILLINGLY WHEN I
TRANSFORM YOU AS I DID
YOUR MOTHER, OR FACE
MY AXE. YOU HAVE
THIRTY DAYS TO DECIDE.

YEAH,
NO.

THE LUMBERCHICKEN'S GOOD SERVANTS? HAH! HE COULD STICK THEM BACK WHERE HE GOT THEM. BUT I STILL HAD TO LEARN ABOUT THEM.

OTHER THAN THE **STINK**, HOW CAN YOUR BUTT-SERVANTS HARM ME? THEY HAVE NO ARMS, AND RUN BACKWARDS!


SERIOUSLY, WHAT JUVENILE MIND WOULD THINK OF THEM?



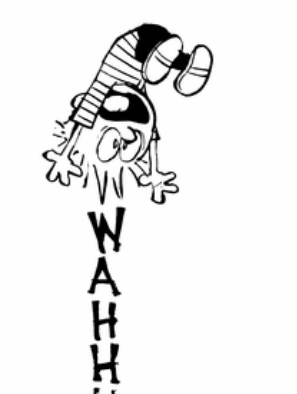
I'LL LET WHAT USED TO BE YOUR MOM SHOW YOU. AND SHE'S ONE OF THE WEAKEST ONES.

DEMONSTRATE YOUR TRUE POWER!

BZZZAAAAARRGGG!



W A H H H



BAM

TELEKINESIS. I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED. GOOD THING THAT THE DUNGEON CEILING WASN'T SPIKED.

I NEEDED TO FIND SOME ALLIES, AND FAST.



MY BUTT-VICEROY COULD PULL MARS OUT OF ORBIT AND CRASH IT ONTO THIS DUNGEON, IF I ALLOWED IT. BUT ALL INMATES ARE TO SERVE OR DIE BY MY WILL ALONE!

"I OWN YOU, EVERYONE HERE AND TRIPLE-GOD-TURNED-TRIPLE-BUTT-VICEROY." YEAH, YEAH.



CONTEMPLATE YOUR FUTURE AND MAKE YOUR CHOICE, PUNY MORTAL. I HAVE OTHER THINGS TO DO.

AND THE VISION FADED FROM MY MIND.

HOLY SCHLAMOLY, IT WAS FINALLY OVER.



ASIDE FROM LANDING BACK ON THE GROUND. RIGHTING MYSELF, I NOTICED ONE PERSON STARING AT ME. NOT A BUTT-PERSON. AN ORDINARY PERSON.

THUMP!




MY NEIGHBOR, SUSIE. EXCEPT SHE'D MOVED AWAY A FEW YEARS BACK. I'D SEEN THE MOVING VAN. WHAT WAS SHE DOING HERE?

AND WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO HER EYE?



SUSIE! IT'S BEEN TOO LONG! HOW HAVE THE TROPICS BEEN SINCE YOU MOVED THERE? AND WHAT'S WITH THE EYE?

YALDABA WATCHE



I'M NOT SUSIE. SUSIE'S MY IDENTICAL TWIN SISTER. I'M SARANNA. YOU KNEW SUSIE?

WAIT, WHAT?



AND DON'T ASK ABOUT THE EYE. I'LL TELL YOU IF I HAVE A REASON TO TRUST YOU.

OR IF YOU MEAN THE EYE ON THAT POSTER, IT WEIRDS ME OUT.



YES, I KNEW SUSIE. SHE NEVER SAID SHE HAD A SISTER.

BECAUSE I DIDN'T GROW UP WITH HER.



SARANNA: I WAS ALWAYS MORE OF A REBEL THAN MY SISTER.

IT'S A SNOW WOMAN.




CALVIN: SUSIE DID THAT TOO! SARANNA: DID THE CHICKEN GOD OBJECT? CALVIN: NO...

YOU HAVE BROKEN COMMANDMENT 11: THOU SHALT BE ASHAMED OF THY NATURAL ANATOMY!



SARANNA: HE OBJECTED TO EVERYTHING I DID, OR SO IT SEEMED. OUR PARENTS SENT ME TO MY COUSIN ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COUNTRY. THEY WERE AFRAID THAT SUSIE WOULD START DRAWING THE CHICKEN GOD'S NOTICE, TOO, AND THEY'D LOSE BOTH THEIR DAUGHTERS TO HIM. THEY HAD NO COURAGE, BUT I ENDURED. IT WAS AWFUL.

ARGH!



YOU HAVE BROKEN COMMANDMENT 32767: THOU SHALT NOT EAT GUMMY BEARS BY RIPPING PIECES OFF DIFFERENTLY-COLORED ONES AND SWAP- PING THEM LIKE GUMMY DR. FRANKENSTEIN BEFOREHAND!

CALVIN: IS THERE ANY OTHER WAY TO EAT THOSE?! SARANNA: I KNOW!



WHAT ARE YOU IN HERE FOR? IT OBVIOUSLY ISN'T BECAUSE A GOD HAS IT IN FOR YOU. RIGHT?

HERESY.



EVERYONE HERE IS IN FOR THAT! WHAT KIND OF HERESY?

YOU WON'T EVEN TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EYE! WHY SHOULD I SPILL THAT?



POINT. THE CHICKEN GOD WANTS US ALL TURNED AGAINST EACH OTHER. I'LL TELL YOU.


OKAY.



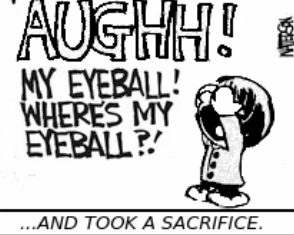















ALTHOUGH I DO HAVE A GOD HOLDING A GRUDGE AGAINST ME, IT'S NOT THE LUMBERCHICKEN.

WHAT? WHO?

YOUR STORY FIRST.



<p>SARANNA: MY COUSIN TREATED ME AS LITTLE MORE THAN A SERVANT. AT LEAST IN PRIVATE. IN PUBLIC, SHE WAS THE BEST SURROGATE MOTHER EVER, TAKING IN THE LITTLE REBEL OUT OF THE GOODNESS OF HER HEART.</p>  <p>HMPH.</p>	<p>CALVIN: YIKES. SARANNA: YEP. AT LEAST SHE LEFT ME ALONE OFTEN ENOUGH TO DO HER OWN THING THAT I COULD LOOK FOR A WAY OUT OF MY SITUATION.</p> 	<p>WE LIVED MUCH FURTHER NORTH THAN MY PARENTS AND SISTER. SO SNOW WAS A LOT MORE COMMON.</p> <p>AND ONE DAY, THE SNOW DEMONS BEHIND IT CALLED ME WITHOUT WORDS, OFFERING ME ONE WISH.</p> <p>I WANTED SIGHT BEYOND SIGHT, SO I COULD LOOK BEYOND THE FOUR WALLS OF THE HOUSE I WAS SO OFTEN TRAPPED IN. THEY GRANTED IT.</p> <p>CALVIN: WOW. HOW'D IT WORK?</p>	<p>SLIPPIN' RIPPIN' DANG FANG ROTTEN ZARG BARG-A-DING DONG!</p> <p>AUGHH!</p> <p>MY EYEBALL! WHERE'S MY EYEBALL?!</p>  <p>...AND TOOK A SACRIFICE.</p>
 <p>SARANNA: EVEN THOUGH THE EYE WAS GONE, I COULD STILL SEE OUT OF THE SOCKET. IT WAS NOW A SPIRITUAL EYE, THE SNOW DEMONS SAID.</p> 	<p>REALITY, WHICH WAS SO SOLID BEFORE, WAS NOW AS FRAGILE AS SNOWFLAKES COMING IN FOR A LANDING, AND WITH MY NEW EYE, I COULD SEE THROUGH IT WHEN I WISHED.</p> <p>IT WOULD ALSO KEEP OTHER PRYING EYES AWAY. I ASKED HOW, AND THEY JUST LAUGHED.</p> 	<p>THE NEXT TIME THE CHICKEN GOD FORCIBLY LOOKED MY WAY, I LEARNED WHAT THEY MEANT. HE WAS FORCED TO LOOK AT A SNOWY LANDSCAPE UNTIL HE WENT SNOW-BLIND.</p> <p>YOU HAVE NOW BROKEN COMMANDMENT... EEEEEEEHHHHHHH!</p> 	<p>HE TRIED AGAIN WITH A TRIPLE-BUTTED ABOMINATION, BUT IT WAS MORE VULNERABLE, AND GOT SNOW-BLINDNESS AND FROSTBITE.</p> 
<p>SO YOU CAN'T BE SPIED ON, EITHER BY THE LUMBERCHICKEN OR HIS BUTT-VICEROY? AND YOU CAN SEE THINGS NO ONE ELSE CAN?</p> <p>RIGHT. BUT I DON'T KNOW WHO ELSE IS LOCKED OUT.</p> 	<p>CALVIN: WHY THE EYEPATCH, THEN? SHOULDN'T SPIRITUAL VISION OR WHATEVER BE SUPER USEFUL?</p> <p>SARANNA: IT'S WAY TOO DISORIENTING TO USE ALL THE TIME. THE PATCH BLUNTS IT ENOUGH THAT I CAN MANAGE WHEN I DON'T WANT TO USE IT.</p> <p>FINALLY, SOME RELIEF!</p> 	<p>CALVIN: WHAT DO I LOOK LIKE UNDER YOUR BLUNTED SPIRITUAL VISION?</p> <p>SARANNA: I CAN COUNT ALL YOUR BONES, AMONG OTHER THINGS.</p> 	<p>CALVIN: WHAT HAPPENED NEXT, AND HOW'D YOU GET HERE?</p> <p>SARANNA: THE CHICKEN GOD RANTED ABOUT MY NEARLY FREEZING THE BUTT-JESUS OUT OF HIS BUTT-VICEROY. THAT'S HOW I LEARNED WHAT THE ABOMINATION WAS.</p> <p>CALVIN: YOU HAVEN'T SEEN THE OTHER BUTT-PEOPLE HE LEADS, THEN?</p> <p>SARANNA: I HADN'T BY THEN, NO. BUT MY COUSIN QUICKLY FOUND OUT WHAT I'D DONE, AND THE EYEPATCH WASN'T ENOUGH TO MAKE ME PASS AS NORMAL. SHE WAS UNHAPPY.</p>
<p>SARANNA: WHEN MY COUSIN MAKES UP HER MIND, YOU DON'T CONFUSE HER WITH THE FACTS.</p> <p>CALVIN: UH-OH.</p> <p>SARANNA: IT WAS, OF COURSE, MY EVIL NATURE.</p> 	<p>CALVIN: BECAUSE YOU WERE A REBEL BY THE STANDARDS OF THE LUMBERCHICKEN, AND YOU DIDN'T LIKE BEING EITHER A SERVANT OR A PRISONER ALL THE TIME?</p> <p>SARANNA: RIGHT. I WAS BAD BY NATURE, AND I'D ONLY BE GOOD BY NATURE IF I'D JUST ACCEPTED MY LOT IN LIFE AND NEVER RESISTED.</p> <p>CALVIN: HOW IS YOUR POWER EVIL, IF YOU DON'T USE IT FOR EVIL?</p> <p>SARANNA: THAT'S THE QUESTION THAT SET HER OFF THE MOST. IT WASN'T FROM THE RIGHT SOURCE.</p>	<p>ARGH! THEN WHAT? SHE BROUGHT YOU TO THIS DUNGEON PERSONALLY?</p> <p>NO, SHE CALLED THE CHICKEN GOD'S ARMY TO TAKE ME!</p> 	<p>SARANNA: THEY COULDN'T SPY ON ME, BUT THEY COULD ON MY COUSIN.</p> <p>CALVIN: SO A WHOLE BUTT-BATTALION SHOWED UP AT YOUR DOOR?</p> <p>SARANNA: I WOULD HAVE RUN, BUT I WAS PINNED IN PLACE UNTIL THEY GOT THERE, AND THEY WERE FLYING.</p> <p>CALVIN: SO THEIR TELEKINESIS WORKED ON BOTH YOU AND THEM?</p> <p>SARANNA: APPARENTLY. THEY BROUGHT ME HERE, AND I'M TO REMAIN UNTIL I JOIN THEM AND GIVE THEM MY POWER. SOMEHOW.</p>
<p>WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR COUSIN? IS SHE HURTING SOMEONE ELSE NOW? I HOPE NOT.</p> <p>THE BUTT-ARMY GOT HER TOO, FOR NOT KEEPING ME UNDER CONTROL PROPERLY.</p> 	<p>THE LUMBERCHICKEN TURNED HER INTO A BUTT-SERVANT TOO, I GUESS?</p> <p>YES. SHE WAS ALWAYS A BUTT IN HER HEART. SHE DESERVED IT.</p> 	<p>SARANNA: WE BOTH WERE FLOWN HERE BY TELEKINESIS. I DEFINITELY GOT MOTION-SICK ON MY COUSIN AND SOME OF THE BUTT-ARMY ON THE WAY, AND THE ARMY'S STENCH ONLY HELPED.</p> <p>CALVIN: WHY IS THE LUMBERCHICKEN TRYING TO BREAK YOU THE SLOW WAY? COULDN'T HE JUST SHOVE YOUR HEAD UP THE BUTT-VICEROY'S...</p> <p>SARANNA: HE GOT FROSTBITE FROM LOOKING THROUGH MY EYES. LOOKING THROUGH MY WHOLE HEAD WOULD LIKELY FREEZE HIM TO DEATH.</p> <p>CALVIN: MAKES SENSE.</p>	<p>BONNNNGG!</p> <p>THERE'S THE LUNCHTIME GONG. JOIN ME, AND I'LL TELL YOU MY STORY WHILE WE EAT.</p> <p>FROZEN WAFFLES AND CANNED SOUP THREE MEALS A DAY. OH JOY.</p> 

LUNCH TODAY IS EITHER CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP OR NEW ENGLAND CLAM CHOWDER. WHICH DO YOU WANT?

THE DUNGEON GOBLINS RUNNING THE CAFETERIA WERE THEIR USUAL GRUFF SELVES.

CHOWDER... IS THAT THE RED OR THE WHITE?

THE WHITE. YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO EVER ASKS THAT.

CHOWDER, THEN. I LIKE CHOWDER.

I KNOW. YOU'RE A CHOWDERHEAD. GO GET IN LINE.

SARANNA STOOD BEHIND ME, HER BROW SUDDENLY FURROWED IN THOUGHT. WAS IT SOMETHING I SAID?

HMMM...

POW

SARANNA-VISION: COULD HE BE THE ONE? POTENTIAL FUTURE: HE CAN ENDURE HARDSHIP.

MOE, YOU WORLD-CLASS POOP HEAD!

ALTERNATE FUTURE DIMENSION IN SPACE: HE CAN ENDURE WORSE HARDSHIP.

FACE ME NOW, MOE! YOU UNCONSCIONABLE POOPFACE!

KRIS STRAUB

BUT CAN HE ENDURE THE ULTIMATE HARDSHIP OF TOPPLING THE CHICKEN GOD AND HIS ENTIRE BUTT-ARMY? THE KEYWORD OF THE VISION FROM MAX HAS BEEN SPOKEN. IT COULD BE.

WHY DO THEY HARDLY EVER HAVE TOMATO SOUP?

LOOKING INTO IT...

IT'S THE CLOSEST I CAN GET TO MY VERY FAVORITE SWISS CHEESE AND KETCHUP SANDWICH!

A GOBLIN LOUNGED NEARBY AS WE SAT.

I NEVER GOT YOUR NAME.

CALVIN.

NICE TO MEET YOU. IS THAT GOBLIN LISTENING?

SAME. ZLAZ THERE IS HARMLESS.

SARANNA: I'VE BEEN HERE LONG ENOUGH TO LEARN HOW SOME THINGS ARE IN HERE. THE DUNGEON GOBLINS ARE ALL IMMUNE TO MIND-READING AND HAVING THEIR WILLS BROKEN, TOO.

CALVIN: LIKE YOU? WHAT DEAL DID THEY MAKE?

SARANNA: THEY'RE NATURALLY THAT WAY BECAUSE THEY'RE FEY. AS POWERFUL AS THE CHICKEN GOD IS, HIS POWERS ARE CELESTIAL, AND ONLY WORK ON MORTALS, NOT FEY OR CELESTIALS. WELL, MOST CELESTIALS. OR DEMONS.

CALVIN: BUT THAT WON'T STOP THEM FROM TURNING US IN.

SARANNA: THEY'RE NOT JUST PRISONERS, THEY'RE SLAVES.

CALVIN: REALLY?

SARANNA: AS FEY, THEY'RE NOT HUMAN BASELINE, WHICH MAKES THEM THE LOWEST OF THE HERETICS. TURNING US IN WOULD GET THEM KILLED ALONG WITH YOU. I'D ONLY BE SPARED BECAUSE MY POWER MAKES ME TOO VALUABLE.

CALVIN: SO WE'RE KINDA SAFE?

SARANNA: FOR NOW.

WHERE'D YOU LEARN SO MUCH? DID THE GOBLINS TELL YOU?

SOME, BUT I READ A LOT BEFORE COMING HERE.

SARANNA: NOW MAKE WITH THE STORYTELLING. I'VE TOLD YOU MY STORY.

CALVIN: I LIVED NEAR ENOUGH TO THE DUNGEON THAT IT MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN IN OUR BASEMENT. MY DAD WAS A LUMBERCHICKEN FANATIC, AND I WAS LOOKING FOR OTHER OPTIONS. MY MOTHER WAS TOO SOFT-HEARTED TO SEND ME HERE, SO SHE GOT TURNED INTO A BUTT-SERVANT AND SENT HERE WITH ME. I GOT THIRTY DAYS, BUT IT TOOK ME HALF OF THAT TO FIND YOU. MY DEALINGS WITH OTHER GODS WERE... TRICKY.

SARANNA: TRICKY HOW? AND YOU HAVEN'T TOUCHED YOUR SOUP. IT'S GETTING COLD.

CALVIN: I CAN FEEL THAT PRESENCE AGAIN. WAIT FOR IT.

GHARG!

SARANNA: WHY DOES YOUR BOWL SUDDENLY HAVE COLD MANICOTTI IN IT?

CALVIN: MY FIRST ATTEMPT AT DEALING WITH ANOTHER GOD DIDN'T GO SO WELL, SO NOW HE TURNS MY FOOD INTO PASTA AT RANDOM INTERVALS. I CAN SENSE IT BEFOREHAND, AND IT ISN'T THAT BAD. I'VE DEVELOPED A TASTE FOR IT.

HOLY CATS!

IT WAS THE FLYING SPAGHETTI MONSTER. HIS AFTERLIFE WAS WEIRD.

I DON'T KNOW MUCH OTHER THAN THE NAME. GO ON.

CALVIN: HIS AFTERLIFE HAD BOTH A BEER FACTORY AND A STRIPPER VOLCANO... DARN IT, I GOT IT BACKWARDS AGAIN. I MEAN A BEER VOLCANO AND A STRIPPER FACTORY.

SARANNA: STRIPPERS? WHAT ARE THOSE?

CALVIN: SOMETHING LIKE THE GOOFY LADIES WHO WEAR THEIR UNDERWEAR ON TV COMMERCIALS. I DON'T GET IT. I DIDN'T SEE THE POINT OF AFTERLIVING THERE, EVEN IF WEARING A COLANDER ON MY HEAD **DID** MAKE ME LOOK SMART.

SARANNA: ROOT BEER IS GOOD, THOUGH. BUT WHY ARE ONLY WOMEN THERE? WHY NOT MEN?

CALVIN: I HAVE NO IDEA. IS IT SOME GENDER THING? AND SUSIE DIDN'T LIKE ROOT BEER, EVEN THOUGH SHE HAD THE SAME FAVORITE SANDWICH AS YOU.

HUH.

SARANNA: INTERESTING. BUT DON'T SAY THE "G" WORD AGAIN, UNLESS YOU WANT THE CHICKEN GOD TAKING AN INTEREST IN THE WORST WAY.

CALVIN: WHAT? IS IT A SWEAR WORD ALL OF A SUDDEN?

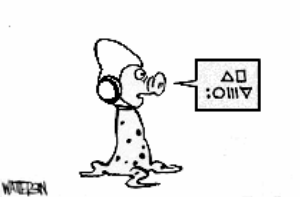
SARANNA: NO, BUT YOU SEE "BOB" THE ALIEN OVER THERE?

ΔΠΟ: ΔΥ

"BOB" IS A TEMAHAZG, AN ALIEN SPECIES WITH SEVEN... "G-WORDS." THE CHICKEN GOD HAS DECLARED THAT EVERYONE HERE HAVE ONLY TWO, REGARDLESS.



CALVIN: BUT WHY? THERE ARE EARTH SPECIES THAT HAVE MORE THAN TWO, AND "BOB" ISN'T EVEN FROM EARTH! SARANNA: I DON'T KNOW, BUT ANYONE WHO QUESTIONS IT GOES IN... THE LIGHT ROOM. CALVIN: WHAT ROOM IS THAT?



A ROOM WITH A VARYING NUMBER OF LIGHTS. TO GET OUT OF IT, YOU HAVE TO KEEP SAYING THERE ARE FIVE LIGHTS, NO MATTER HOW MANY THERE ARE.



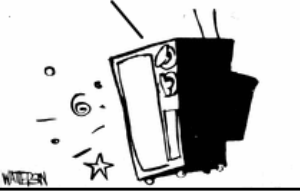
CALVIN: WHAT IF SLIME MOLD IS IN THERE? ONE SPECIES OF IT HAS SEVEN HUNDRED AND TWENTY G-WORDS! SARANNA: EEEW, GROSS! CALVIN: GROSS THINGS ARE COOL! AND HOW WELL DOES THE LUMBERCHICKEN REALLY LISTEN? SARANNA: YOU WEREN'T HERE FOR ANOTHER PRISONER FROM ANOTHER WORLD, C-H-E-N-D-A-R-R THE BARBARIAN. THAT WAS A FUN MONTH. CALVIN: SOUNDS LIKE SAYING THAT ONE WORD ENOUGH IS A WAY TO SUMMON HIM, THEN!

BACK TO YOUR STORY. WE DON'T HAVE LONG TILL LUNCH IS OVER, AND THEN IT'S DEMORALIZING HOUR. WAIT, WHAT DAY IS IT, WEDNESDAY OR THURSDAY?



CALVIN: THURSDAY, SO FUTILE LAWYER COMMERCIAL HOUR.

THEY DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT MONEY, BECAUSE IT'S TOO VULGAR! BUT MONEY ISN'T HEMORRHOID CREAM, IT'S MONEY! CALL JOEL "THE SLAMMER" HANLEY!



RIGHT. REBEL CENOTAPH CONTEMPLATION HOUR IS TOMORROW. REMIND ME TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING THEN.



CALVIN: THE NEXT GOD-LIKE THING I LOOKED INTO WAS ERIC, THE GOD-EATING MAGIC PENGUIN. SARANNA: BUT HE'S SUPPOSED TO EAT ALL GODS, NOT JUST ONE, AND YOU ALREADY DEALT WITH ONE GOD. CALVIN: I DIDN'T KNOW THAT AT THE TIME. BESIDES, HE TURNED OUT TO HAVE BEEN EATEN BY THE SEAL OF APPROVAL, WHO EATS ALL GOD-EATING THINGS AND VOMITS THE GODS UP INTACT. SARANNA: RIGHT. WIZARD SUNFLARE'S GRIMOIRE HAD NOTES ABOUT THAT.

CALVIN: WIZARDS? GRIMOIRES? IF YOU'RE LIKE SUSIE, YOU'RE READ A LOT MORE THAN I HAVE, BUT WHERE DID YOU FIND STUFF LIKE THAT? SARANNA: I'LL TELL YOU TOMORROW. TRUST ME, I GUESS I AM A LOT LIKE SUSIE THAT WAY, BUT YOU'VE ALSO LEARNED SOME STUFF I DON'T KNOW. GO ON. CALVIN: I KEPT LOOKING.



AMITABHA SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA AT FIRST. MEDITATING AND CHANTING HIS NAME DID HELP ME TAP INTO... SOMETHING LIKE UNIVERSAL ONENESS.



BUT SITTING STILL FOR THAT LONG WASN'T MY THING. AND HIS IDEA OF COMPASSION WAS THAT IF SOMEONE BEAT ME UP, I SHOULD BE THANKFUL THEY DIDN'T DO WORSE INSTEAD OF FIGHTING BACK. THAT'D ONLY MAKE THE MOES OF THE WORLD GET WORSE. ON THE OTHER HAND, CHANTING HIS NAME WAS EVEN EASIER ONCE I LEARNED HIS OTHER NAME, AMITAYUS. SARANNA: WHY IS THAT? CALVIN: SINGING HIS NAME WAS EASIER THAN CHANTING IT, AND THERE'S THIS SONG I HEARD ON THE RADIO, "ROCK ME, AMADEUS..." SARANNA: YOU DIDN'T, AND THOSE DON'T QUITE RHYME!

CALVIN: I WASN'T TRYING TO OFFEND HIM! I DIDN'T WANT ANOTHER ENEMY! AT LEAST HE SEEMED TO UNDERSTAND, AND I LOOKED ELSEWHERE. SARANNA: I SUPPOSE, MAYBE I SHOULD TELL THE DUNGEON GOBLIN CHORAL GROUP. CALVIN: THEIR SARCASTIC TAKE ON "THE BANKS OF THE DON" WAS HILARIOUS!



SARANNA: SO YOU DEALT WITH A LOT OF GODS AND GOD-LIKE ENTITIES. HOW MUCH MORE DID YOU HAVE TO SEARCH? CALVIN: NOT LONG, IT TURNED OUT, BUT THERE WERE A FEW MORE TWISTS.



AT LEAST YOU WERE ABLE TO SEARCH. HAVING THE CHICKEN GOD SPY ON ME CUT OFF ALL MY OPTIONS. GETTING THE SNOW DEMONS' ATTENTION WAS MY BIG BREAK.



CALVIN: I'LL HAVE TO LOOK INTO THEM. BUT I TOOK TWO MORE STEPS TO GET HERE. SARANNA: ONLY THAT MANY? GO ON. CALVIN: THE NEXT THING I LOOKED INTO WAS A FORMER ENEMY OF THE BUTT-VICEROY, BEFORE THE LUMBERCHICKEN GIT HIS TALONS INTO HIM. HIS NAME WAS SATAN. SARANNA: JUST BECAUSE HE'S YOUR ENEMY'S ENEMY, IT DOESN'T MAKE HIM YOUR FRIEND. CALVIN: I KNOW. I NEEDED TO BE SURE. IT TURNED OUT HE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT EVIL WAS.

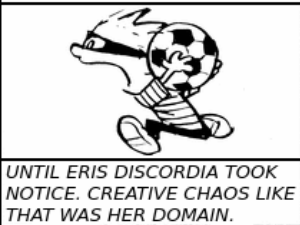
SARANNA: THAT MIGHT WORK. CALVIN: IT DIDN'T. HIS IDEA OF HELPING PEOPLE WAS MAKING THEM HAPPY BY DRIVING THEM MAD OR KILLING THEM. THEN IT TURNED OUT HE WAS NAMED AFTER HIS EVIL UNCLE, AND ALL MY DEALINGS WITH HIM TURNED OUT TO BE A CRAZY DREAM. AT LEAST I THINK SO. SARANNA: BIZARRE.



SARANNA: WHY'D YOU WORK WITH AN ENEMY OF THE BUTT-VICEROY INSTEAD OF THE CHICKEN GOD? CALVIN: ANYONE WHO'S SO GOOD AT BREAKING HERETICS THAT THEY'RE KEPT ALIVE FOR THAT IS STILL AN ENEMY. SARANNA: RIGHT. WHO'D YOU CALL ON NEXT? CALVIN: ACTUALLY, SHE CALLED ON ME.



AFTER... A BAD EXPERIENCE PLAYING AN ORGANIZED SPORT AT RECESS, I'D COME UP WITH A COMPLETELY DISORGANIZED SPORT OF MY OWN. CALVINBALL. WHERE I'D JUST MAKE UP THE RULES AS I WENT. BUT I HAD NO ONE TO PLAY IT WITH.

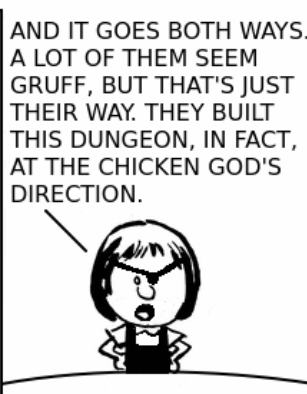
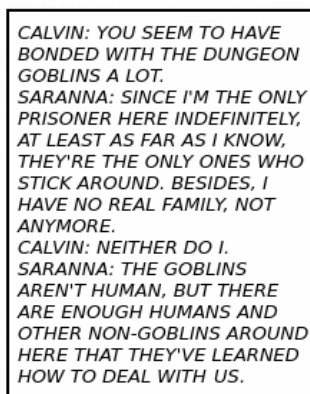
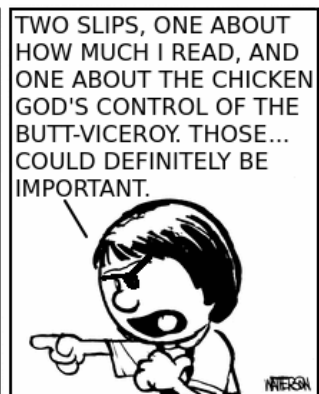
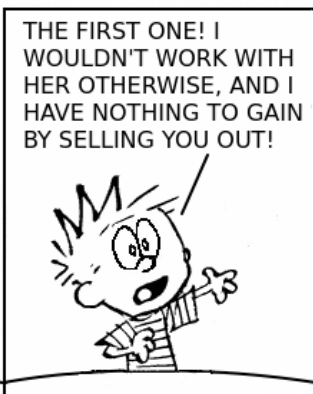
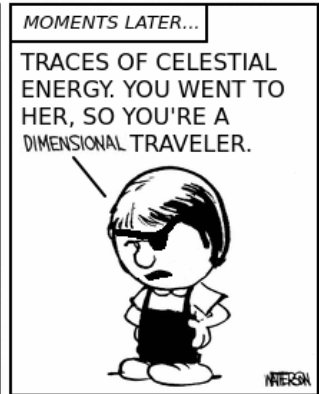
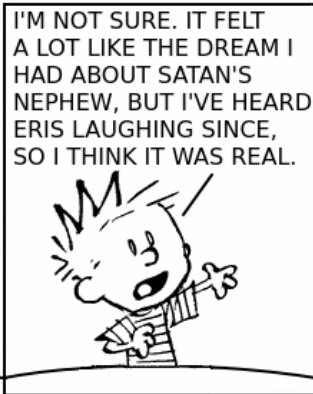
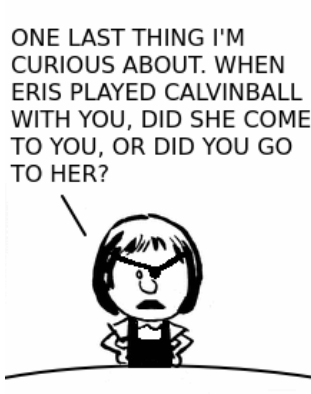
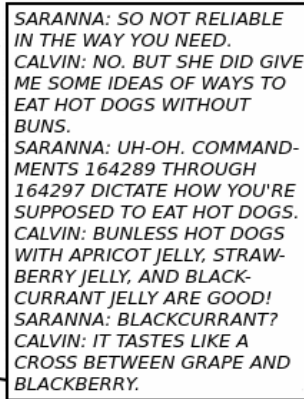
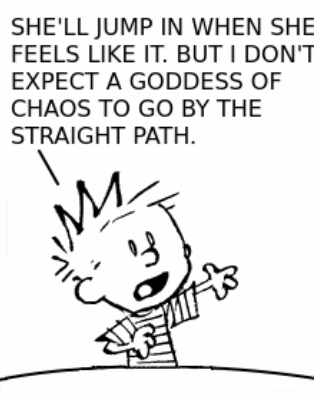


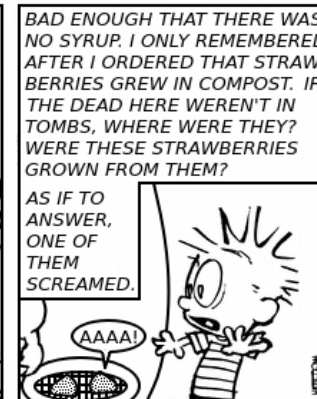
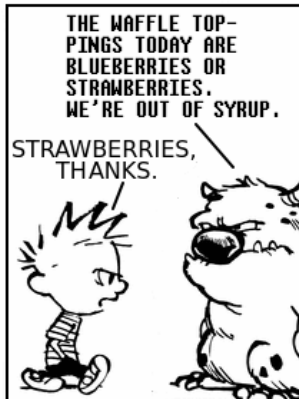
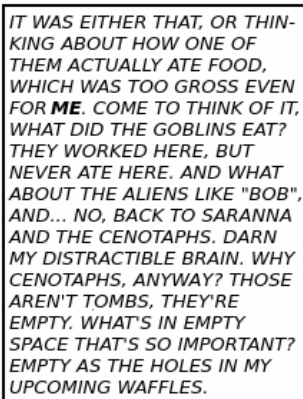
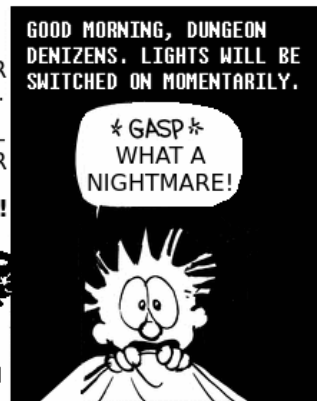
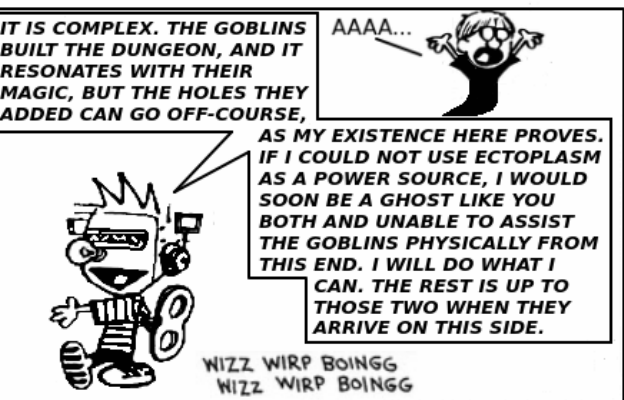
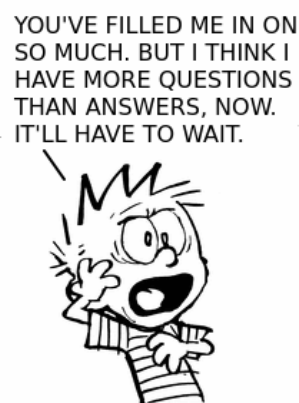
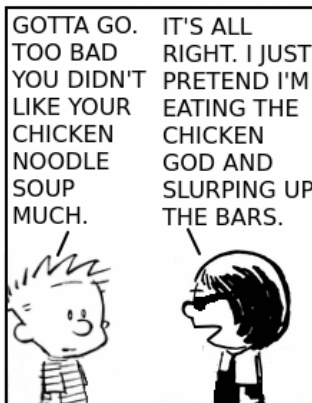
MAN, SHE PICKED UP THE NUANCES OF THIS GAME FAST!



HA! THIS IS FUN!







I PANICKED. IF ANYONE ELSE HAD HEARD THAT, I WAS UP FOR PUNISHMENT. NO ONE WOULD BELIEVE THAT THE STRAWBERRY HAD SCREAMED ON ITS OWN, AND COMMANDMENT 98304, "THOU SHALT NOT PERFORM WORDLESS STRAWBERRY VENTRILOQUISM," WAS CLEARLY SHOWN ON THE FOOD COMMANDMENTS WALL IN FRONT OF ME.



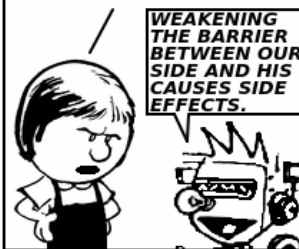
LUCKILY, IT SEEMED I WAS THE ONLY ONE. WHAT WAS UP?

THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH YOUR STRAWBERRIES. TAKE YOUR FOOD AND GO. HUMANS, SOMETIMES...



IF I HAD ONLY KNOWN WHAT WAS HAPPENING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF A HOLE...

CAREFUL, BRIAN! WE DON'T NEED TO SCARE HIM!



AS A GHOST, YOU COULD SPEAK THROUGH THE STRAWBERRIES OF THE DEAD AND REASSURE HIM THAT NOTHING IS WRONG. THERE IS NO COMMANDMENT AGAINST SPOKEN STRAWBERRY VENTRILOQUISM.

YET. AND THAT WOULD MAKE THINGS WORSE.



I KEPT SENSING WEIRD THINGS THROUGHOUT THE DAY, AND WHEN I MET SARANNA AT LUNCH, SHE WAS DISTRACTED.

CRAP ON A CRUTCH, MY SPIRITUAL VISION'S BEEN GOING CRAZY TODAY!

WHERE'D YOU PICK UP THAT PHRASE?



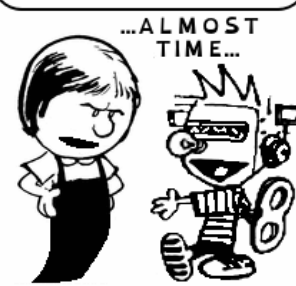
SARANNA-VISION: ANOTHER ALTERNATE FUTURE DIMENSION IN SPACE... WAIT, WHEN AND WHERE ARE WE AGAIN?



I SAID THERE ARE TWO OF ME! AND THE OTHER ME IS A ROBOT! DON'T YOU SEE IT TOO?!



NOW I DO, AND THERE ARE ALSO TWO OF ME. BUT I CAN'T HEAR THEM THAT WELL.



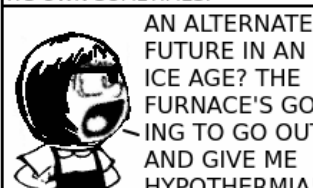
TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION, IT'S MY SPIRITUAL VISION AGAIN. I CAN SEE POTENTIAL FUTURES.

SO THAT PHRASE WAS FROM THERE? AND IT'S ALSO HOW YOU KNEW YOUR SOUP TODAY?



SARANNA: YES TO BOTH. THE EGG DROP SOUP WAS THE MOST LIKELY OPTION AT 99%. THE OPTION AT 1% WAS POTATO SOUP. CALVIN: SO IT'S NOT CERTAIN? SARANNA: ONE THING I'VE LEARNED FROM MY VISION IS THAT NOTHING'S CERTAIN. I CAN ALWAYS DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN MYSELF DO IN THE FUTURE. I'VE DONE IT BEFORE. CALVIN: HOW DID YOU GET CAPTURED AND BROUGHT HERE, SINCE YOU COULD SEE IT COMING? SARANNA: IT WOULD HAVE ENDED BADLY IF I'D RESISTED OR RUN. I RISKED LIFTING THE EYEPATCH TO CHECK. CALVIN: TO GET MORE THAN GLIMPSES OF THE FUTURE?

SARANNA: I CAN SEE THE FUTURE EITHER WAY, BUT THE EYEPATCH BLUNTS IT ENOUGH THAT I HAVE TO CONCENTRATE A LOT MORE TO PICK IT UP. AND I SOMETIMES GET ALTERNATE FUTURES. THOSE USUALLY MEAN THAT MY VISION'S TRYING TO KEEP ME ALIVE BY HINTING AT SOMETHING. IT HAS A MIND OF ITS OWN SOMETIMES.



DOES IT TELL YOU ANYTHING ABOUT THE WEIRDNESS HAPPENING TO US BOTH RIGHT NOW?



ALL I CAN SAY IS THAT I KNEW THIS WOULD HAPPEN TODAY, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW EXACTLY HOW IT WOULD.



YES. HOLD OUT UNTIL CENOTAPH HOUR, AND I'LL LEAD YOU RIGHT TO ONE YOU'LL DEFINITELY WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT.



I WAS SO CURIOUS THAT I COULD BARELY FINISH MY SOUP, BUT I MADE IT. AFTER GETTING THE USUAL SPEECH FROM THE LUMBERCHICKEN ABOUT HOW THIS WAS WHAT THE DEFIANT DESERVED, THEY WEREN'T EVEN BURIED HERE, THEY ONLY GOT MARKERS AS A SHOW OF HOW LITTLE REMEMBERED THEY WERE, AND SO ON, I WAS READY TO SEE WHAT ALL THE FUSS WAS ABOUT. BESIDES, SARANNA LIKELY KNEW WHO SOME OF THE MARKERS REFERRED TO, GIVEN ALL THAT SHE'D PICKED UP IN HER LONG STAY HERE. I WASN'T IGNORANT, BUT I STILL HAD MUCH TO LEARN.

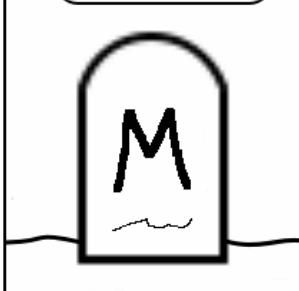
AND LEARN, I WOULD...



HOW CAN YOU TELL IT APART FROM THE OTHER "M" MARKERS?



SEE WHAT'S SCRATCHED BELOW THE "M"?

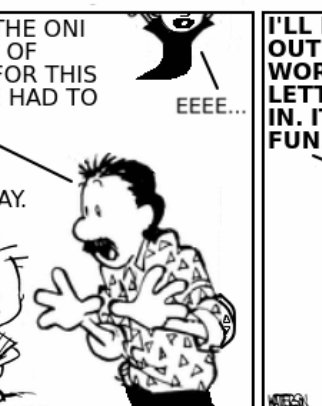
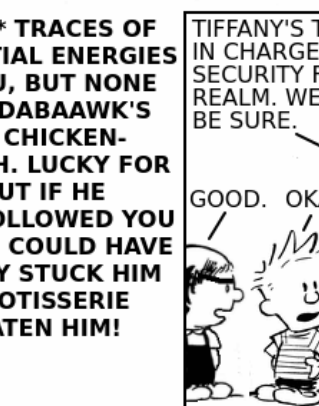
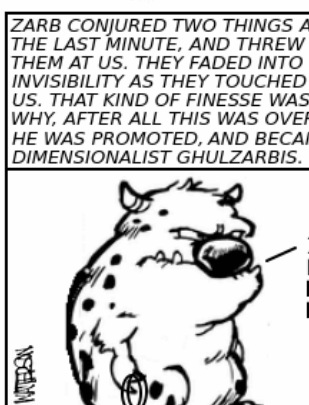
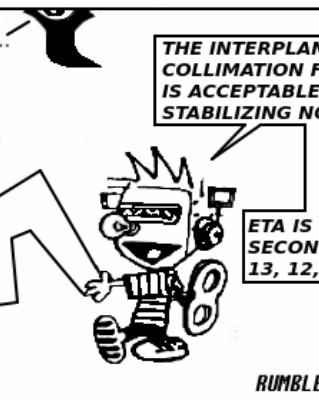
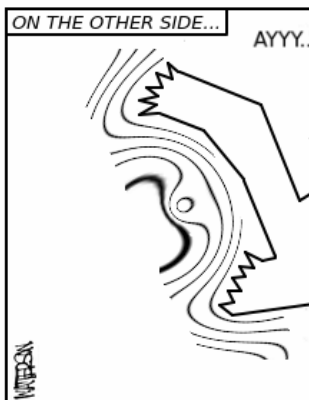
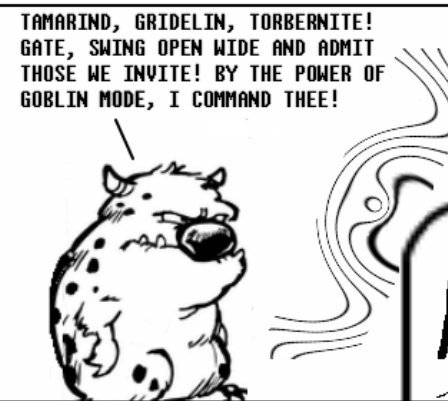
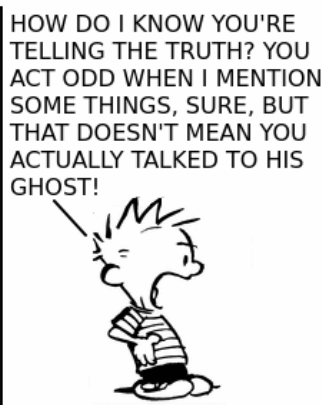
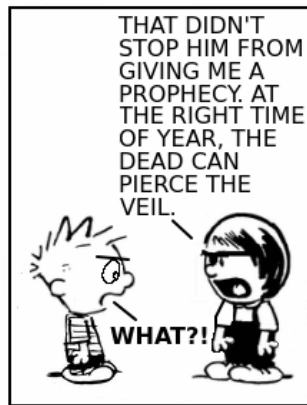


"HELLO, C." AND THE NUMBER FROM THAT GUESSING GAME I PLAYED WITH UNCLE MAX WHEN I LAST SAW HIM!



IS IT 92,376,051? BY GEORGE, IT IS!





TAKING ON THE BUTT-ARMY WOULD BE EASY WITH THEIR LEADER DEAD. THE RULES ALLOW FOR THAT CASE. I AND MY KIN COULD GO TO THEM.

AS IT STANDS, I MUST STAY IN THIS REALM AND KEEP GUARDING IT.



IT SEEMS THAT THE PROPHECY GUIDES US, SO THE CHICKEN'S FATE IS IN YOU MORTALS' HANDS, NOT MINE.



WHICH IS A SHAME.

THE HULKING CREATURE THEN PICKED UP HER CLUB... AND UNSCREWED ITS END. IT WAS NOT A WEAPON, BUT ACTUALLY A MASSIVE THERMOS, AND IT SMELLED OF THE STRONGEST COFFEE EVER. SHE CHUGGED DOWN A HEALTHY AMOUNT, MUTTERED UNDER HER BREATH ABOUT HOW HER PAPERWORK WAS NEVER DONE AND HOW HER SISTER ROSIE GOT TO GO TO WAR ALL THE TIME WHILE GUARDING HER HELL-REALM, TURNED ON HER HEELS, AND RAN FROM OUR SIGHT FASTER THAN ANYONE EXPECTED HER TO BE ABLE TO MOVE.

WHY DOES SHE DRINK COFFEE INSTEAD OF ALCOHOL, AND WHY DOES HER FAMILY HAVE NON-JAPANESE NAMES?

I ASKED ONCE. SHE WOULD ONLY SAY SHE WAS ATYPICAL.



I HADN'T SAID MUCH SINCE WE ARRIVED, BUT I WAS STILL IN SHOCK. SARANNA HAD BEEN HERE AT LEAST ONCE BEFORE, AND OBVIOUSLY KNEW OF ONI.

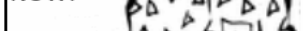
SO WHAT DO WE DO NOW? WHAT IS THE PROPHECY?



AND WHY ARE YOU HERE, UNCLE MAX? AND IS THAT A GHOST OF CHICKEN POOP THERE?

THE PROPHECY IS WHAT WILL HELP US TAKE THE LUMBERCHICKEN DOWN FOR GOOD. IT WOULD BE EASIER IF TIFFANY ATE HIM, YES, BUT BREAKING IT, OR TRYING TO, IS HOW BRIAN GOT HERE.

SUSIE, BRIAN, YOU CAN COME OUT NOW!



SARANNA! IT'S BEEN SO LONG! HOW HAVE YOU BEEN?

SALUTATIONS TO BOTH OF YOU!



BRIAN THE PROPHECY-BENDING ROBOT? THAT WAS... ODD.

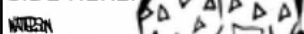
MY ORIGINAL NAME IS B-DPGWKLHPTPNN-783458-4265457242423820978-2429580182546288260, BUT THE NON-ROBOTICS IN THIS DIMENSION PREFER SHORTER TERMS, SO BRIAN WILL DO.



THAT WAS... LESS ODD.

AS FOR HOW I GOT HERE, I DIED. THIS IS A GHOST-REALM FOR THOSE WITH UNFINISHED BUSINESS. BUT YOU WANT TO KNOW HOW I DIED. SARANNA, YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS TOO.

TIME HAS STOPPED FOR YOU BOTH OUTSIDE HERE.



THE ELABORATE RITUAL THAT BROUGHT YOU TWO HERE OUT OF SEASON ENSURED THAT, AND HOW MAX DIED IS ALSO TIED TO HOW I DIED.



I HATE HAVING TO PUT OFF CATCHING UP, BUT WE HAVE ALL THE TIME WE NEED.

BRIAN: IT IS A LONG STORY THAT INVOLVES ME AS WELL.

MAX: YES, BUT FOR YOU TO TRULY UNDERSTAND... ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE LUMBERCHICKEN'S SPECIAL PUNISHMENTS?

BRIAN: YOU SHOULD BE, GIVEN THAT THE UPCOMING HOLIDAY OF CHICKMAS INVOLVES THEM. CALVIN: YES, THE LESSON GOT POUNDED INTO ME LAST WEEK DURING SPECIAL CONVERSION HOUR. AFTER THE BUTT-VICEROY MADE SOME PRISONERS... GOOD SERVANTS.

MAX: GOOD SERVANTS? I'D CALL THEM BUTTHEADS, GIVEN WHAT HAPPENS TO THEM.

CALVIN: I'LL HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT!

SARANNA: ... CALVIN: GO ON!

THE PROPHECY REFERS TO THE CHAMPION'S "ARRIVING AT A TIME OF DOUBLE WAR." AS WE KNOW, CHICKMAS IS THE TIME WHEN THE LUMBERCHICKEN SIRES A CHICK, FINDS OUT THAT IT HAS TOO MUCH FREE WILL IN THE EGG, KILLS IT AS COMPETITION, AND FEEDS IT TO HIS TRUE FOLLOWERS. THE WAR OF CHICKMAS IS FOUGHT OVER HOW THE EGG IS COOKED AND SERVED. THIS YEAR, THE SIDES ARE EITHER OMELET OR FRITTATA.



I'M NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO THE LUMBERCHICKEN'S STRUTTING AROUND WEARING THAT FAKE PLUMAGE AND DEMANDING EVERYONE CALL HIM "BIG HIGH WAR CHICKEN" FOR A DAY.



NEITHER AM I.

ONLY HIS FANATICS DO, AND THE DUNGEON GOBLINS COMPLETELY DESPISE IT. HE EXTENDED ONE OF THE WARS OF CHICKMAS TO CONQUER AND ENSLAVE THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE.



AFTER HE MADE THEM BUILD THE DUNGEON, HE STARTED GIVING HIS SPECIAL PUNISHMENTS TO ANY PRISONER IN IT WHO ESPECIALLY DEFIED HIM. TRANSFORMING THEM INTO BUTT-PEOPLE WAS STANDARD. TRANSFORMING THEM INTO OTHER THINGS WAS SPECIAL. AND THE LOSERS OF THE WAR OF CHICKMAS DESERVED SPECIAL TREATMENT.

CALVIN: YES, HE TOLD ME ABOUT THAT.

MAX: BUT DID HE TELL YOU WHAT SOME OF HIS SPECIFIC PUNISHMENTS WERE?

CALVIN: NO, I THINK HE WAS RELYING MORE ON THE CONSTANT THREAT OF THEM.

MAX: HE'D MAKE HALF-THINGS OUT OF PEOPLE. HALF-OYSTER AND HALF-CARROT WERE ESPECIALLY FRIGHTENING. BUT HE CAME UP WITH NEW ONES AS TIME WENT ON. YOU THINK HAVING HIM EAT YOU AND TURN YOU INTO POOP IS BAD? TRY WHEN HE DIVINELY KILLS YOU AFTERWARD AND TURNS YOU INTO A POOP GHOST!

CALVIN: ONE THAT CAN'T TALK? MAX: EXACTLY!

THE LAST TIME I VISITED, I COULD SENSE THAT MY BROTHER WAS PLANNING SOMETHING, SO I GOT AS FAR AWAY AS I COULD.



WHICH IS WHY YOU WERE GONE FOR SO LONG? I WONDERED.

MAX: HE'D ALWAYS HAD A TENDENCY TO BE FANATICAL, BUT IT WAS USUALLY AT A MANAGEABLE LEVEL. THIS TIME, SOMETHING, I DON'T KNOW WHAT, HAD SHIFTED IN HIM. I HAD TO FIND OUT MORE.



I REALLY WISH I'D BEEN ABLE TO TAKE YOU WITH ME.

HECK, I'LL COME WITH YOU! SO LONG, MOM! BYE, DAD!

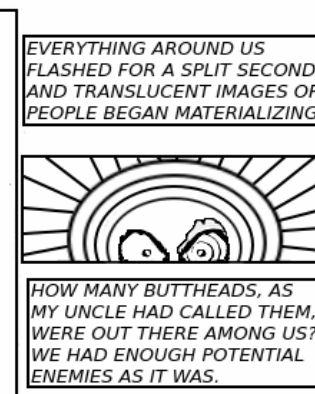
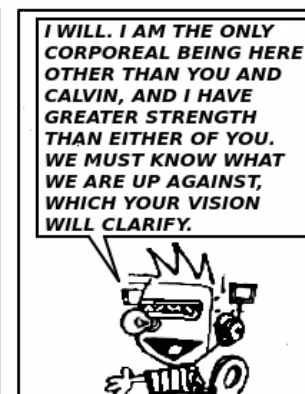
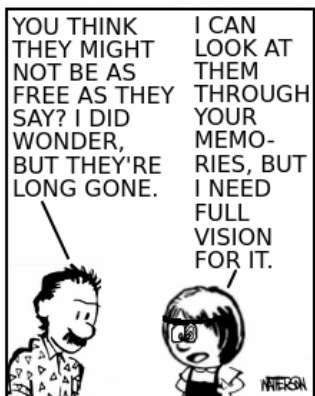
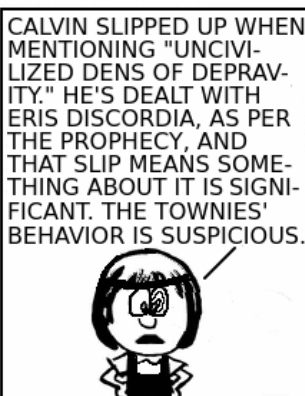
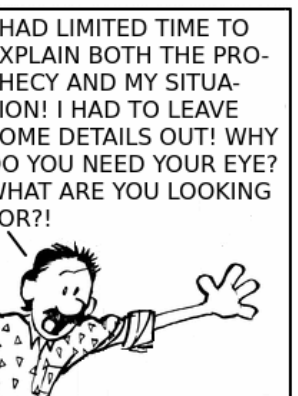
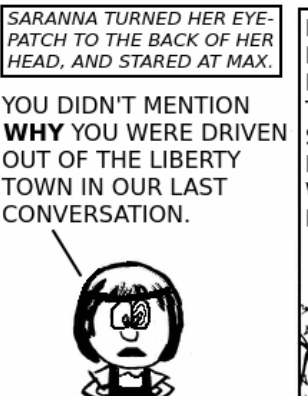
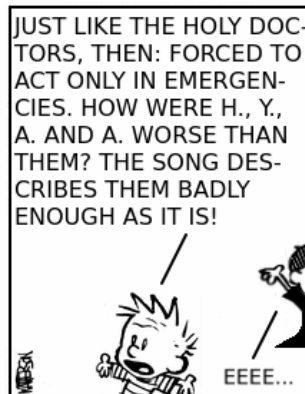
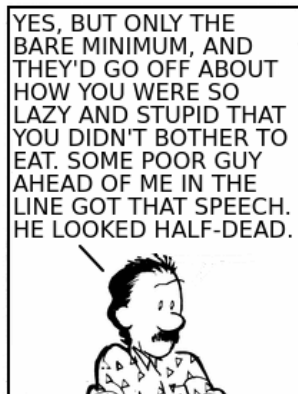
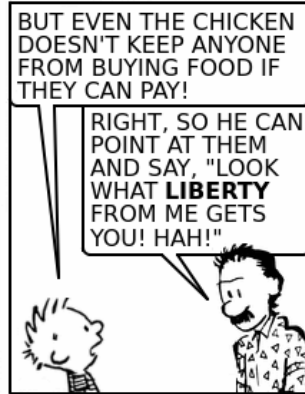
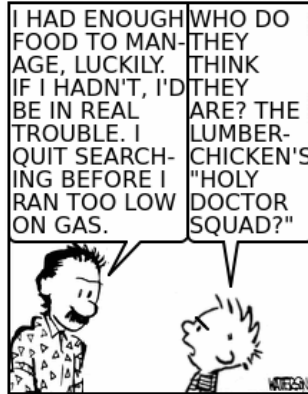
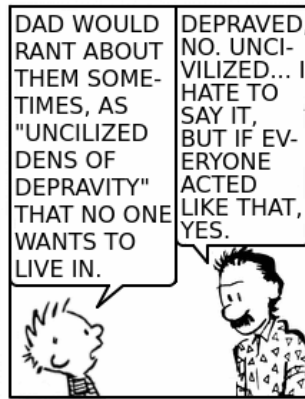
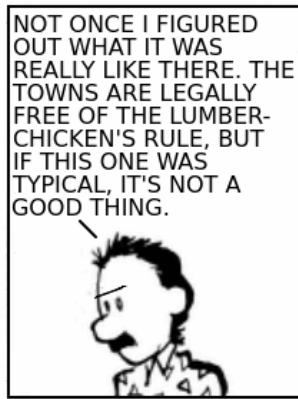
CALVIN, GET BACK HERE!



AND YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE WHERE I EVENTUALLY ENDED UP!



WITH ALL I'VE BEEN THROUGH IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS, MAYBE NOT!



SARANNA-VISION: SCANNING MEMORIES...

RESENTS OUTSIDERS AS THREATS TO HIS STATUS IN TOWN. CLEAN.



USES HER OWN LIBERTY AS A WEAPON AGAINST OUTSIDERS. CLEAN.



HAS NO OBJECTION TO OUTSIDERS, BUT IS OVERRIDDEN BY OTHERS. CLEAN.



HAS THE TICS CAUSED BY A PERSONALITY WIPE, AND A BROWN HALO INVISIBLE TO ALL BUT THE CHICKEN GOD, HIS BUTT-PEOPLE, AND ME. DANGEROUS.



CONTINUING...

AFTER HER EXHAUSTIVE SCAN...

DO NOT WORRY. I HAVE YOU.



OF THE SIXTY-THREE PEOPLE YOU DEALT WITH OVER YOUR SIX WEEKS THERE, SIXTY-THREE WERE AS FREE AS YOU ARE, MAX... UUUHHH...



SO ONLY A FEW NEED TO BE AGENTS, AND THE REST FOLLOW THEM BY CHOICE? HOW DOOMED ARE WE, PROPHECY NOTWITHSTANDING?!



TO BE CLEAR, THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH LIBERTY OR FREE CHOICE, BUT WHEN YOU NEED SOMETHING YOU CAN'T GET YOURSELF OR DO YOURSELF, IF OTHER PEOPLE DON'T HAVE TO DO THINGS, MOST OF THEM WON'T DO THEM.

THEY'RE JUST BIGGER KIDS?



UNFORTUNATELY, YES.

IT MAY NOT BE AS BAD AS YOU THINK. PER MY ANALYSIS, THE NON-AGENTS DID NOT APPEAR TO RECOGNIZE THE AGENTS AS SUCH, SO THEY ARE NOT KNOWINGLY SERVING.

NOT MUCH BETTER.



SINCE YOU SURVIVED FOR SIX WEEKS THERE, I GUESS YOU FOUND A WAY AROUND THE LACK OF AVAILABLE FOOD?

YES, SMUGGLERS. AT LEAST I DIDN'T GET SICK BEFORE I FOUND THEM.



AND SPEAKING OF SICKNESS, HOW ABOUT THAT SONG? ONCE SARANNA'S HAD ENOUGH TIME TO RECOVER, OF COURSE.

I'VE NEVER HEARD IT, EITHER, BUT MY SISTER COMES FIRST.



UUUHHH... I'LL NEED ABOUT FIFTEEN MINUTES. GRAVITY, OR WHATEVER PASSES FOR IT HERE, IS REALLY WEIRD.



♪ The So-Called Healers ♪

Hurmdel and Yoomnac, Ailon, Acceo,
Always were using their right to say no!
Acceo, Ailon, Yoomnac and Hurmdel,
Were healers who let their patients go to, well...
H. and then Y., and A. and then A!
The Chicken God looked upon them one day
And praised them for killing the useless vermin,
(Not!) Lifting one finger and letting them termin-
Ate in the name of His holy Work Ethic!
Improving His servant stock wasn't malefic!

By using their Authority to deflect all Blame,
Truth no longer mattered! Death to all the lame!
The Chicken so glad from their lack of all shame,
Made them demigods! They were so pleased, they came...
To the Bahamas! Why, what did you think?

Their goals and the Chicken's were now all in sync!
Put in charge of all healthcare before they could blink!
No man could bypass them, or he'd be a fink!
"Cleanse my planet's blood of its contamination!"
He charged, and left How to their imagination.

"You're lying! You're lazy! It's all in your head!"
Were just a small bit of the things that they said.
And what they put on paper was always believed.
"Two plus two is five. You don't like that? Then leave!"
They'd throw temper tantrums and then run away.
Unprofessional? Hah! They got paid anyway!
Rich patients were different. They were worthy of life.
The four treated them reverently and without strife.
The treatment they got was all behind closed doors.
Confidential, to hide how the four were all horr-

♪ The So-Called Healers ♪ (Part 2)

Ifyingly efficient at serving the Chicken!
But this didn't last. The plot started to thicken.
They started believing that they were the gods,
And the Chicken they claimed to serve was just a fraud!
They spilled more and more blood, past the point of all reason.
Killing people who could at least praise Him? T'was treason!
So what the Chicken God gave, He then took away,
"No more gods before me, or looking sideways
At me! For I am the only One!
My Archons on other worlds can have their fun,

But here, I will always win!" So He said.
And the four so-called healers were instantly dead.

WHO CAME UP WITH THAT?! IT'S MOST OF THE TRUTH, YES, BUT SOME PARTS OF IT...

UH... SOME PEOPLE ENJOY THEMSELVES WAY TOO MUCH THERE!

THE TEACHERS WOULD GO BONKERS OVER THE BAHAMAS REFERENCE. WHY IS THAT?

AND THEY WANT TO GO THERE AS A REWARD FOR BEING ABLE TO KILL A LOT MORE PEOPLE? EESH!



IMAGINE WHAT I THINK NOW. YEARS LATER.

SOME OF THE STUFF IN THAT SONG IS NOT FOR KIDS' EARS.

....NICE TRY.

IT'S NOT ABOUT WORDS, BUT CONCEPTS. SOME WORDS CAN BE INAPPROPRIATE, BUT THEY'RE JUST WORDS.

WHICH PARTS OF IT AREN'T?

I KNOW WHERE THEY REALLY LET THEIR PATIENTS GO, FOR ONE.

YOU EVER HEAR THE PHRASE WITH NO SWEAR WORDS IN IT? "I WENT TO THE DAM MAN TO GET SOME DAM WATER. THE DAM MAN SAID HE DIDN'T HAVE ANY DAM WATER. SO I TOLD THE DAM MAN HE COULD KEEP HIS DAM WATER." *SNICKER*

MY POINT IS, SAVE FREAK-OUTS OVER WORDS FOR WHEN THEY'RE REALLY NEEDED, OR YOU'RE JUST THE NEXT LUMBERCHICKEN.

SO HOW WERE THE TOWNIES ALMOST AS BAD AS THE FOUR?

THE TOWNIES DID PUT ESSENTIAL THINGS BEHIND GATE-KEEPERS, BUT THEY DIDN'T HAVE **TOTAL** CONTROL.

SO IF YOU WENT TO ANOTHER LIBERTY TOWN, YOU COULD START AGAIN THERE?

YES. UNLIKE DEALINGS WITH THE SO-CALLED HEALERS. ONCE THEY PUT SOMETHING INTO YOUR RECORD, THERE WAS NO ESCAPING IT, NO MATTER WHAT YOU TRIED.

SO IF THEY SAID IT WAS "ALL IN YOUR HEAD," LIKE THE SONG, THEY'D NEVER TAKE YOU SERIOUSLY AGAIN? UNLESS MAYBE YOU HAD SOMETHING **REALLY** BAD THEY COULDN'T IGNORE?

THEY'D CALL IT "NONSENSE PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES," BUT YES. AND IF THEY SAID THAT YOU HAD "SLUGGISH SCHIZOPHRENIA," FORGET IT.

THAT WAS EVEN WORSE? HOW COULD IT GET EVEN WORSE?

THAT WAS THE TERM THEY HAD TO DISCREDIT PATIENTS PERMANENTLY. THEY BORROWED IT FROM A PRE-CHICKEN TOTALITARIAN REGIME, WHICH THE CHICKEN PERMITTED BECAUSE IT SERVED HIS PURPOSES.

AND THEY FAVORED THE RICH, TOO? SO ANYONE ELSE WAS AN EASY TARGET?

EXACTLY. IT'S HOW THEY STAYED SO RICH THEMSELVES, UNTIL THEY GOT TOO BLOOD-THIRSTY.

WHAT WERE THEY DOING FOR RICH PEOPLE THAT WAS WORTH SO MUCH? BEING EFFICIENT ISN'T THE WHOLE STORY, SINCE BEING REALLY EFFICIENT AT KILLING IS BLOODTHIRSTY BY DEFINITION. MY TEACHERS WENT BONKERS OVER **THAT** SONG PART.

UH... **ANYTHING** THAT THE RICH PEOPLE WANTED, NO MATTER WHAT. THE CHICKEN NEEDS SOME FAVORED AND LOTS OF DISFAVORED.

SOUNDS LIKE THE LIBERTY TOWN, EXCEPT THEY CHANGE WHO'S WHO.

PRETTY MUCH. SOME STANDARDS ARE NEEDED, BUT IF YOU GO THROUGH LIFE (OR AFTERLIFE, OR WHATEVER) LOOKING FOR TARGETS, YOU'LL FIND THEM EVERYWHERE. THAT'S CHICKEN-THOUGHT.

ANYWAY, IT WAS ONE OF THE RARE TIMES THE CHICKEN CHANGED HIS MIND THAT INVOLVED DROPPING RULES RATHER THAN ADDING NEW ONES. IT WAS REALLY A WAY TO PUBLICLY BLAME THE FOUR SO HE'D LOOK BETTER. HE GAVE THEM NEW NAMES, CELESTIAL POWER, AND AUTHORITY, AND THEY TRIED TO USURP HIM AS PAYBACK.

CALVIN: BUT SINCE THE FOUR WERE DEMIGODS AND HE'S A GOD, SHOULDN'T THEY HAVE FIGURED OUT IN ADVANCE THAT THEY'D LOSE?
MAX: THEY HADN'T LOST IN SO LONG THAT THEY'D FORGOTTEN IT WAS **POSSIBLE** FOR THEM TO LOSE. HE STRIPPED THEM OF THEIR POWER, THEIR LIVES, AND ALL THEIR RELEVANCE IN FIVE MINUTES OR SO. THE FACT THAT THERE'S ONLY A SONG REFERENCING THEM NOW THAT EVERYONE THINKS IS JUST A **STORY** IS A TESTAMENT TO HOW HE DOES THINGS. WAR WITH HIM IS...

REALLY HARD? BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE, OR WE WOULDN'T BE HERE. AND HE STILL GAVE POWER TO HIS BUTT-VICEROY!

I HAVE NO IDEA WHY HE DID THAT. LET ME GET BACK TO HOW I GOT HERE.

THE FOOD SMUGGLERS WERE A LOT MORE SYMPATHETIC THAN THE OTHER TOWNIES. ALTHOUGH THERE WAS STILL THE OCCASIONAL ONE WHO'D SNEER THAT I COULD GET PEOPLE TO SELL ME FOOD IF I **REALLY** TRIED.

LIKE I COULD JUST GET OUT THE MAGNUM AND NOT END UP IN THEIR JAIL, WHERE NO ONE WAS FORCED TO FEED YOU EITHER! I FINALLY GOT TIRED OF HAVING TO HIDE SO MUCH, GOT A FULL TANK OF GAS FROM THE STATION, AND SET OFF FOR A VERY DIFFERENT LIBERTY TOWN.

MAX: I HAD TO PROVE WHAT A REBEL I WAS IN ORDER TO GET IN AND HAVE THEM HELP ME, BUT THAT WAS PRETTY EASY.
CALVIN: HOW?
MAX: I'D BEEN IN A BAND IN COLLEGE, STILL DURING THE PRE-CHICKEN ERA.

NOW WHERE'D I LEAVE MY KAZOO?

IT WAS "FAUSTUS," "SAMMY," AND ME. I WENT BY "PHAZON." WE ONLY PUT OUT ONE ALBUM, BUT IT WAS DEEMED AMORAL ENOUGH THAT THE MORAL GUARDIAN SQUAD GOT INVOLVED.

WHAT'S THAT?

IT WAS THE SECRET POLICE FORMED TO UPHOLD WHAT THE OLD TRINITY CALLED "MORALITY." WHEN THE LUMBERCHICKEN TOOK OVER AND TURNED THEM INTO THE BUTT-FATHER, THE BUTT-SON, AND THE HOLY FART-SPIRIT IN ONE BODY, HE TOOK IT OVER, TOO, AND MADE IT HIS ANTI-HERESY SQUAD.



YOU, SARANNA, AND SUSIE LIVED THROUGH SOME OF THE TRINITY ERA, BUT I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH YOU TWO REMEMBER OF IT.



NOT MUCH.

A LOT.

WHAT DID MY BROTHER SHOW YOU?

PIECES OF A HORROR MOVIE THAT SHOWED WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I DIDN'T SHAPE UP.



OOOO...

MAX: WHICH ONE? CALVIN: "THE EXORCIST." IF I DIDN'T FOLLOW ALL THE RIGHT RULES, I'D END UP POSSESSED. MAX: *SPEECHLESS* CALVIN: I FIGURED SOMETHING CHANGED WHEN SUDDENLY SOME LINES IN IT SHIFTED: "THE POWER OF CHRIST COMPELS YOU" BECAME "THE POWER OF CHICKEN COMPELS YOU." BUT THE LINE ABOUT THE MOTHER DOING WEIRD STUFF WITH ROOSTERS IN HELL STAYED THE SAME. I GUESS ALL THE LUMBER-CHICKEN'S DEAD SONS FROM THE WARS OF CHICKMAS WERE THERE? MAX: ...NEVER MIND. GODS... SARANNA: SO WHAT DID THE MORAL GUARDIAN SQUAD DO?

THEY DECIDED TO TAKE ALL THE SONGS ON THE ALBUM SERIOUSLY, AND ASSUMED WE WERE A TRIO OF OCCULTIST CRIMINALS. I DON'T KNOW WHY WE GOT PUNISHED WHEN THE OTHER BANDS DIDN'T.



SOMETIMES YOU'RE JUST A TARGET BECAUSE THEY NEED ONE.



AS YOU AND OUR PARENTS WOULD KNOW.

THAT WAS... NOT A GOOD DECEMBER.

DID THEY PUT YOU IN JAIL?

YES, FOR THE WHOLE MONTH, PROCLAIMING HOW GENEROUS THEY WERE FOR NOT DOING WORSE.



WAIT! MUSICIANS JAILED IN DECEMBER OVER SACRILEGE AGAINST THE TRINITY? THE ONE THAT LED TO COMMANDMENT 72, "THOU SHALT NOT USE THE WORD 'QUASAR' AS A SWEAR WORD, FOR IT IS THE WORST OF ABOMINATIONS?"



YES, BUT IT WAS REALLY "FAUSTUS" IDEA. IT LED TO A RIOT OVER FREE SPEECH, WHERE THE RIOTERS ALL CHANTED IT, AND THE LUMBERCHICKEN BANNED THAT USE OF THE WORD OFFICIALLY WHEN HE TOOK OVER.



BUT I DON'T THINK IT'S COMMANDMENT 72. 72 IS AGAINST EATING HAMBURGERS WITH MAYONNAISE.



I'VE HEARD SO MANY, I SOMETIMES CAN'T KEEP THE NUMBERS STRAIGHT.

IT'S NOT 73, EITHER. 73 IS AGAINST EATING HAMBURGERS WITH MAYONNAISE AND EXTRA PICKLES.



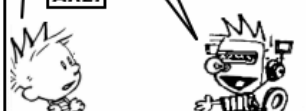
I NEVER BROKE THOSE. MY COUSIN REFUSED TO LET ME EAT HAMBURGERS BECAUSE SHE SAID THEY RESEMBLED BREASTS.

ACCORDING TO MY DATABASE, IT IS COMMANDMENT 74. COMMANDMENT 75 IS AGAINST REPEATING THE NUMBER SIX MORE THAN TWICE IN A ROW. SINCE MY PROCESSOR IS BASE THIRTY-SIX, OR SIX PLUS SIX PLUS SIX PLUS SIX PLUS SIX PLUS SIX, I AM AN ABOMINATION AS WELL, COMPARED TO THE BASE TWO MACHINES OF THIS DIMENSION.



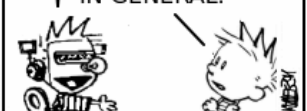
AREN'T YOU AN ABOMINATION IN THE CHICKEN'S EYES ANYWAY, FOR BEING A MACHINE?

NO. I COULD BE REPROGRAMMED TO SERVE HIM, AND I AM IN A FORM THAT IS NOT ALIEN BY HIS STANDARDS, SUCH AS THEY ARE.

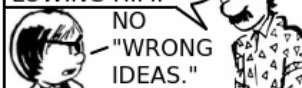


ALTHOUGH MY BEING AN ALTERNATE UNIVERSE VERSION OF YOU COULD LIKELY SET HIM OFF REGARDLESS. BUT WE ARE GETTING AHEAD OF OURSELVES.

IT'S FUNNY. DAD WOULD OBJECT TO THE NUMBER SIX IN GENERAL.



THAT'S IN THE UNWRITTEN COMMANDMENTS. THE CHICKEN SEES HIMSELF AS THE CONSERVER OF ORDER, SO YOU HAVE TO BE A "GOOD CONSERVATIVE" TO EVEN START FOLLOWING HIM.



NO "WRONG IDEAS."

I'M SURE MY BROTHER MADE SURE YOU WERE NEVER EXPOSED TO ANY "WRONG IDEAS" WHENEVER HE COULD.

IS THE "ONLY TWO GENDERS" IDEA ONE OF THEM?

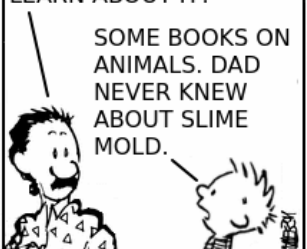


OOPS! I SAID THE G-WORD! CAN HE HEAR THAT?

RELAX. HE CAN'T HEAR ANYTHING WE SAY HERE, ESPECIALLY WITH TIME FROZEN.



SO MY BROTHER'S NOT PERFECT, NO MATTER WHAT HE TRIES TO CLAIM. WHERE'D YOU LEARN ABOUT IT?



SOME BOOKS ON ANIMALS. DAD NEVER KNEW ABOUT SLIME MOLD.

I MENTIONED SPERM WHALES TO HIM, BUT HE WAS WEIRD ABOUT IT. IF I SAID "SPERM WHALE," HE WAS FINE, BUT IF I SAID "SPERM" ON ITS OWN, HE'D LOSE IT. THAT'S ANOTHER WORD YOU CAN ONLY SAY THE "RIGHT" WAY, I GUESS?



YES. ONLY TWO GENDERS, NOT SAYING "SPERM" EXCEPT IN... VERY CERTAIN, PROPER CIRCUMSTANCES, ETC.? ALL UNWRITTEN RULES. FOR NOW.

"HEY, CHICKEN! YOU'RE A SIX-GENDERED SPERM QUASAR! HA HA!"



I'D NEVER BEEN ABLE TO FIND WORK IN THE OLD LIBERTY TOWN, AND I WAS LOW ON MONEY WHEN I LEFT, SO IT WAS A STROKE OF LUCK THAT I WAS ABLE TO FIND A NEW LIBERTY TOWN THAT GAVE ME A BETTER DEAL.



ESPECIALLY FOR REBEL-
LING IN PRE-CHICKEN
TIMES. SOME TOWNS
WOULD DEMAND SOME-
THING CURRENT, SINCE
THE CHICKEN HAD TAKEN
OVER BY THEN. I HAD
HIGH ENOUGH STATUS
THAT PEOPLE DIDN'T
DARE CHEAT ME TO MY
FACE.



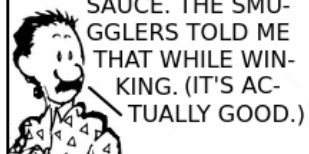
RIGHT. THOSE TOWNIES
WOULD TELL YOU THEY'D
DO THINGS, AND THEN
BLOW YOU OFF WITH,
"WHEN I SAID THAT, I
WAS JUST TRYING TO BE
NICE." OR THEY'D DO
THINGS EXACTLY **ONCE**
IN PUBLIC, TELL YOU TO
"CALL ME IF YOU NEED
ANYTHING," AND GET EN-
RAGED IF YOU ACTUALLY
DID THAT, BE-
CAUSE THEY WERE "BUSY."



SERIOUSLY, THE ONLY
GOOD THINGS ABOUT
THE OLD TOWN WERE
THAT THE SMUGGLERS
WERE FRIENDLY AND
THE BARBECUED MUT-
TON THEY HAD THERE
WAS TO DIE FOR... IF
YOU COULD GET YOUR
HANDS ON IT.



NO. THE CHICKEN'S COM-
MANDMENTS SEEM TO
BE BASED ON WHIMS
MORE THAN ENJOYMENT.
THERE WERE ONLY TWO
ADDED WHILE I WAS
THERE: 476268 BANNED
MIXING GRITS AND PIZZA
SAUCE. THE SMUG-
GLERS TOLD ME
THAT WHILE WIN-
KING. (IT'S ACTUALLY
GOOD.)



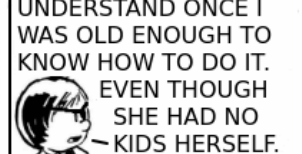
AND 476269 BANNED
USING "EQUALS SIGN NO
LONGER REQUIRED" AS A
EUPHEMISM FOR... UH,
MATING. LIBERTY TOWNS
ARE EXEMPT FROM ALL
BUT THE FIRST TEN COM-
MANDMENTS, SO THE
OTHERS ONLY COME UP
AS BAR TRIVIA, AND I HAP-
PENED TO OVER-
HEAR SOMEONE
TALKING ABOUT
IT AS THEY WALKED BY.



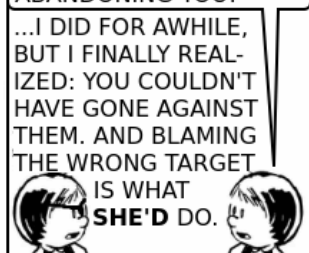
ONLY TWO NEW
RULES IN SIX
WEEKS? HE MUST
HAVE HAD AN OFF
MONTH-AND-A-
HALF.



SHE'D FLIP OUT IF SHE
HEARD IT CALLED "MA-
KING LOVE," BECAUSE
SHE SAID NO ONE
SHOULD EVER LOVE
ANYONE BUT THE CHI-
CKEN GOD. I ASKED
WHY, AND SHE SAID I'D
UNDERSTAND ONCE I
WAS OLD ENOUGH TO
KNOW HOW TO DO IT.
EVEN THOUGH
SHE HAD NO
KIDS HERSELF.



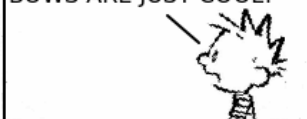
WHAT WERE OUR PAR-
ENTS THINKING, LEAVING
YOU WITH HER? I HOPE
YOU DON'T HATE ME FOR
ABANDONING YOU!



YIKES. THE CLOSEST I
GOT TO THAT WAS
MOM'S BIG LECTURE ON
COMIC BOOKS. THE ONE
WITH AMAZON GIRL AND
THE HYPER-PHASE DISTOR-
TION BLASTER WAS MUCH
TOO VIOLENT, AND THE
ONE WITH RAINBOW RAI-
DER VERSUS BATMAN
HAD THE VILLAIN WIN
SAYING "I BE-
LIEVE IN ME!",
WHICH SHE
SAID WAS
"UNGODLY."



AND THEN DAD JUMPED
IN ABOUT HOW RAINBOW
RAIDER'S BEING A WIN-
NER MIGHT ENCOURAGE
ME TO... MATE WITH THE
WRONG SORT OF PEOPLE.
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT HE
MEANT, OR WHAT IT HAD
TO DO WITH THAT. RAIN-
BOWS ARE JUST COOL!



HE SAID I NEEDED TO
"LISTEN TO FACTS."



"ARPHAXAD" IS
MY BROTHER'S
NAME. HE NEVER
TOLD YOU
THAT? I'M SUR-
PRISED, GIVEN
HIS HUGE EGO.
DOES HE THINK
IT'S SACRED, OR
SOMETHING?



HE DID SAY THAT
I SHOULD NEVER
REFER TO THROW-
ING UP AS "ARF-
ING," OR CALL YOU
MAXIMILIAN, SINCE
IT SOUNDS LIKE
"MAX, A MILLION."



OOOO...
HE IS STILL HUNG
UP ON NEVER HEAR-
ING MAX'S CHILD-
HOOD NICKNAME,
WHILE HE WEAPON-
IZES HIS OWN. A
PURBLIND HUMAN.



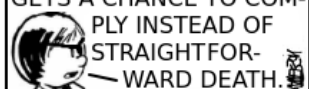
MY BROTHER'S
ALWAYS BEEN
ARROGANT AND
WILLING TO
LATCH ONTO
WHOEVER HE
THINKS WILL
PUT HIM IN A
POSITION OF
POWER.



DAD'S COLLEGE YEARBOOK
SHOWED ME THAT.



CALVIN'S BEING HIS ONLY
CHILD IS WHY HE THREW
CALVIN IN THE DUNGEON.
AS A HIGH-RANKING FOL-
LOWER OF THE CHICKEN,
HIS OFFSPRING REFLECT
ON HIM. AT LEAST THAT'S
WHAT I'VE PICKED UP
FROM OTHER PRISONERS
DURING MY STAY. CALVIN
GETS A CHANCE TO COM-
PLY INSTEAD OF
STRAIGHTFOR-
WARD DEATH.



MOM AND DAD TRIED TO
HAVE ANOTHER BABY,
BUT MOM SAID SOME-
THING WENT WRONG,
AND THEY COULDN'T
HAVE ANY MORE AFTER
ME. MAYBE IT WOULD
HAVE CHANGED THINGS
IF THEY COULD?

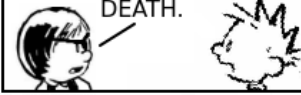


SARANNA-VISION: 97% LIKELY ALTERNATE TIMELINE.



AND THEN, WITH ME DEAD AND "MELVILLE" A GOOD STOOGIE, THE LUMBERCHICKEN WOULD RULE UNOPPOSED?

NOT FOR THAT LONG. "MELVILLE" WOULD HAVE HIS FATHER'S EGO, AND THEY'D SOON FIGHT OVER WHO GOT TO BE IN CHARGE. TO THE DEATH.



AND THE CHICKEN ISN'T UNOPPOSED, EVEN WITHOUT YOU TWO IN THE LIVING WORLD. LIBERTY TOWNS ALL HAVE FREEDOM OF RELIGION, EXCEPT FOR "POLITICALLY DANGEROUS" RELIGIONS. **THEY'RE BANNED.**

WHAT ARE THOSE?



ANY RELIGION THAT'S PRIMARILY FOCUSED ON SEIZING POLITICAL POWER IN THE LIVING WORLD. THE BEST KNOWN IS, OF COURSE, CHICKENISM, BUT SMALL POCKETS OF OTHER ONES ARE ALL OVER THE PLACE.

LIKE WHAT?



MAX: SOME FOLLOWERS OF THE OLD SO-CALLED MONOTHEISMS SWEAR THAT THE LUMBERCHICKEN DIDN'T ACTUALLY TURN THEIR GODS INTO POOP AND STILL WORSHIP THEM, EVEN AFTER MAKING A PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY SEPTIC TANK DURING DECIDE DAY AND SEEING THE POOP FOR THEMSELVES. CALVIN: DO SOME OF THEM START WORSHIPPING THE POOP INSTEAD? MAX: SOME PEOPLE WORSHIP ANYTHING. I RAN INTO ONE GUY WHO WORSHIPPED THE DYSLEXIC VAMPIRE GHOST "NOSRETTAW" AS THE ORIGINAL CREATOR OF THE AFTER-LIFE PLANES, AND WOULD SCRAWL HIS NAME ALL OVER.

THERE ARE GHOST VAMPIRES? I THOUGHT THEY WERE UNDEAD ALREADY AND COULDN'T BE GHOSTS!

I'VE LEARNED A LOT ABOUT GHOSTS SINCE I BECAME ONE.



GHOSTHOOD IS JUST A STATE OF BEING DEAD AND NON-PHYSICAL. THE PHYSICAL DEAD CAN BECOME NON-PHYSICAL WITH THE RIGHT METHODS. AND WHAT CAN BE DEAD IS FLEXIBLE, TOO.

HOW FLEXIBLE?



FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO COUNT AS ANIMISM, WHICH THE CHICKEN CALLS HERESY. REMEMBER THE BOOK-BURNING ERA THAT INTENSIFIED WHEN THE CHICKEN TOOK OVER?

WHO WOULDN'T? ESPECIALLY SINCE I READ A LOT MORE AFTER I STARTED FIGHTING HIM.

YOU HAVE CHANGED!



THE BURNED BOOKS TURNED INTO GHOSTS, AND THEY'RE AVAILABLE IN CERTAIN LIBRARIES ON THIS SIDE, IF YOU KNOW WHERE TO LOOK.

AND CAN STAY ON TIFFANY'S GOOD SIDE.



I KNOW ABOUT ANIMISM. I HAD SOME BAD EXPERIENCES TRYING TO RIDE A BIKE THAT DIDN'T WANT TO BE RIDDEN. DOES IT APPLY TO EVERYTHING?

YES. SOME THINGS I KNOW WHAT THEY'RE GETTING INTO. YOU DON'T HAVE TO APOLOGIZE TO EVERYTHING. JUST BE MORE CAREFUL.

INFORMATION IS NOT LOST. MY PEOPLE ARE SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE MULTIVERSE SINCE THE CHICKEN BROKE MY HOME REALITY BY CONSUMING ITS SPIRITUAL ENERGY FOR HIS ASCENSION.

BRIAN: I SOMETIMES GOT A TRANSMISSION FROM ONE OF THEM, OR FOUND GRAFFITI WRITTEN IN MY LANGUAGE CARVED INTO WRECKAGE, BEFORE I CAME HERE.

4565993709434879170-1485587124276568358-2843020246246048968? PREPOSTEROUS. I NEITHER LOOK NOR SMELL LIKE A BABOON.

SARANNA: SO THE CHICKEN GOD HAS DONE EVEN WORSE THAN I THOUGHT. CALVIN: ALTHOUGH FINDING TRACES OF THEM MEANS THAT THEY'RE NOT GONE, BUT HE'LL HAVE TO APOLOGIZE TO AN ENTIRE REALITY'S WORTH OF STUFF, AND I'LL ONLY HAVE TO APOLOGIZE TO A SHIRT FOR WHAT I DID TO IT ONE TIME.



I GUESS THE GHOST LIBRARIES HOLD SECRETS THAT COULD TAKE THE LUMBERCHICKEN DOWN, SINCE HE WOULDN'T BURN BOOKS UNLESS THEY THREATENED HIM SOMEHOW?

DEFINITELY.



BUT HE WOULD SOMETIMES BURN BOOKS BECAUSE HE COULD, AND THEN CLAIM THAT HE WAS THE REAL DISCOVERER OF WHAT WAS IN THEM, IN ORDER TO REWRITE HISTORY IN HIS FAVOR.

I'VE SEEN THAT.



HOW COULD YOU HAVE SEEN THAT? UNLESS YOU WENT TO THE GHOST LIBRARY WHEN MAX TALKED TO YOU LAST TIME?

NO SUCH LUCK. BUT THE CHICKEN DOESN'T PAY AS MUCH ATTENTION AS HE SHOULD.



HE MOSTLY WATCHES AND LISTENS DURING MEALTIMES IN THE DUNGEON. OTHER TIMES, LIKE DEMORALIZING HOURS, HE ONLY DOES IF HE FEELS LIKE IT, BECAUSE HE THINKS THAT WE'RE SECURE AND HE CAN LET HIS GUARD DOWN. LUCKY FOR US AND THE GOBLINS. THE DUNGEON LIBRARY HAS A FEW OLD BOOKS HE MISSED...



I TAKE IT THE GOBLINS STILL HAVE YOU UNDER THEIR PROTECTION?

YES. THEY'VE INDUCTED ME INTO THEIR SOCIETY BY NOW. I'M AN HONORARY GREMLIN.



THERE ARE DUNGEON GREMLINS AS WELL AS GOBLINS?

"GREMLIN" IS A TITLE FOR A GOBLIN WITH MORE APTITUDE FOR TECHNOLOGY THAN MAGIC. I WASN'T BORN A GOBLIN, SO THEIR NATURAL MAGIC IS BEYOND ME.



YOUR SPIRITUAL VISION DOESN'T QUALIFY YOU, AS POWERFUL AS IT IS?


NO, BUT THAT KIND OF MAGIC IS BEYOND THEM. THEY CAN MAKE DEALS WITH OTHER POWERS IF THEY WISH, BUT THEY USUALLY GET WARPED, UNLIKE NON-FEY.



THOSE WHO MAKE SUCH DEALS ARE WARLOCKS, AND THEY MOSTLY END UP TWISTED INTO ELDritch HORRORS. BUT SOME END UP TWISTED INTO DIFFERENT SPECIES INSTEAD. ONE CLAN THAT MADE A DEAL FOR GREAT STRENGTH BECAME ORCS, AND GOBLINS STILL DEAL WITH THEM BECAUSE THEY'RE STILL SANE.




THE ORCS ARE DIFFERENT ENOUGH FROM THE GOBLINS THAT THE CHICKEN GOD'S MAGICAL YOKE ON THE GOBLINS HAS NO HOLD ON THEM. SO MOST OF THE ORCS GOT AWAY FROM HIM, EXCEPT FOR THE OCCASIONAL STRAGGLER CAUGHT BY HIS NON-HUMAN RAIDER SQUADS.



THE RAIDERS ARE NON-HUMAN, OR THEY RAID FOR NON-HUMANS?

BOTH, SOMETIMES. SOME SELL THEIR OWN PEOPLE OUT TO SAVE THEMSELVES, UNTIL HE TURNS ON THEM.




WHY IS A CHICKEN SO OBSESSED WITH HUMANITY? SHOULDN'T HIS BUTT-SERVANTS BE BIRD-LIKE CLOACA-SERVANTS?

I HAVE NO IDEA. MY BEST GUESS IS THAT TOO MUCH POWER DRIVES ANYONE MAD.



SO THAT'S HOW "BOB" THE ALIEN AND OTHERS LIKE... THEM GOT IN THE DUNGEON. BUT GETTING TO OTHER DIMENSIONS AND STUFF IS HARD, GIVEN WHAT WE HAD TO DO TO GET HERE.

SOME PLACES HAVE NATURAL RIFTS BETWEEN THEM, LIKE CERTAIN LIBERTY TOWNS.



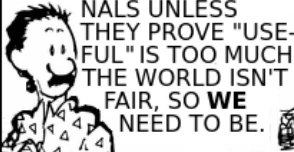
SOUNDS COOL TO ME. BUT DAD WOULD GO OFF SOMETIMES ABOUT HOW PEOPLE FROM OTHER REALITIES WERE RUINING THIS ONE BY COMING HERE ILLEGALLY.

EACH LIBERTY TOWN SET UP ITS OWN LEGAL PROCEEDINGS FOR THEM.

SO THEY EACH MADE UP THEIR OWN WAYS?




PRETTY MUCH. WHAT WAS LEGAL DEPENDED ENTIRELY ON WHO WAS ENFORCING THINGS, WHICH... VARIED A LOT. KEEPING EXTRADIMENSIONAL CRIMINALS OUT IS ONE THING, BUT MAKING LAWS SAYING ALL SUCH PEOPLE ARE CRIMINALS UNLESS THEY PROVE "USEFUL" IS TOO MUCH. THE WORLD ISN'T FAIR, SO WE NEED TO BE.



EVEN WITH GODS WHO COULD INTERVENE? I'VE WORKED WITH SEVERAL WHO COULD, BESIDES ERIS.

WHEN AND HOW THEY INTERVENE VARIES A LOT, TOO, NOT COUNTING HOW THEY FIGHT AND TEAR DOWN EACH OTHERS' WORK SOMETIMES.



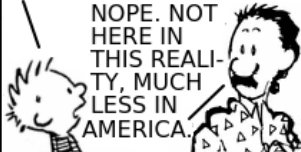
A LOT OF LEGAL STUFF SOUNDS LIKE IT'S EITHER MEAN OR IT'S ARBITRARY. AS FOR THE GODS, I GUESS I'VE BEEN LUCKY.

JUST DON'T FALL IN THE TRAP OF "THEY'RE UNWORTHY OF MY TIME UNLESS THEY DO WHAT I WANT." THAT'S BAD ENOUGH WHEN APPLIED TO PEOPLE.



THE LUMBERCHICKEN'S FROM ANOTHER REALITY, AND THERE'S NO MENTION OF HIS SIGNING THE LEGAL PAPERWORK TO BE HERE THAT I CAN FIND, NOT IN THE ROOSTER TESTAMENT, ANY OF THE CHICK TRACTS, OR THE POULTRY VUH.


NOPE. NOT HERE IN THIS REALITY, MUCH LESS IN AMERICA.



THE SAME APPLIES TO THE OLD TRINITY, ODDLY ENOUGH. BUT DON'T TELL ANYONE WHO THINKS LIKE MY BROTHER THAT.


I... POINTED IT OUT ONCE WHILE HE WAS RANTING ABOUT DIMENSIONAL INVADERS.

UH-OH.



HE GOT AS ANGRY AS I'VE EVER SEEN HIM, ONLY THE SECOND TIME HE'S DONE THAT. HIS VOICE WENT UP AN OCTAVE, HE SAID "IT'S **NOT** THE SAME THING!", AND WENT OFF ON SOME EXPLANATION THAT MADE NO SENSE UNTIL HE DEVOLVED INTO SHOUTING THAT I HAD NO MORALS.

"MELVILLE" WOULD TOO.




CALVIN: AND THEN HE WRAPPED UP BY SAYING THAT HE WAS ENTIRELY INDEPENDENT. HE THOUGHT FOR HIMSELF, AND HE WORSHIPPED THE OLD TRINITY BECAUSE IT WAS WHAT THE VAST MAJORITY OF AMERICANS BELIEVED IN.

SARANNA: UNTIL THE CHICKEN TOOK OVER AND HE CHANGED SIDES, RIGHT? AND HE HAS NO WAY OF KNOWING WHAT ANYONE BELIEVES.


MAX: SO MY BROTHER THE MAVERICK EXPRESSES HIS INDIVIDUALITY THROUGH CONFORMITY IN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS? THAT'S TYPICAL OF HIM. WAIT, THE **SECOND** TIME? WHAT WAS THE FIRST?

THERE WAS A TV COMMERCIAL WHICH SHOWED JESUS AS A LUMBERJACK, GOING OUT AT SUNRISE TO CUT DOWN DEADWOOD. "KEEP FAITH, OR HE'LL CUT YOU DOWN."




I REMEMBER THAT. IT'S SUPREME IRONY THAT A MEMBER OF THE OLD TRINITY WOULD SHOW UP AS A LUMBERJACK.

SOME KIDS AT SCHOOL WERE TALKING ABOUT IT. AND ONE SAID, "BY JESUS' MORNING WOOD!"




I THOUGHT IT WAS ANOTHER WAY TO REFER TO A LUMBERJACK'S LOAD, UNTIL I MENTIONED IT AROUND DAD. HE WRAPPED UP **THAT** EXPLOSION WITH A LECTURE ON THE PENALTY FOR BLASPHEMY.




AND SOMETHING ABOUT COMMANDMENT 11, AND HOW HE SWORE JESUS DIDN'T HAVE ANY ANATOMY WORTH BEING ASHAMED OF, WHATEVER THAT MEANT.

GODS...

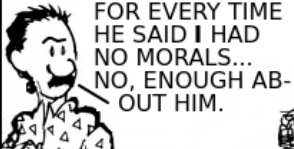


I STILL DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT, BUT SINCE THE CHICKEN FUSED JESUS WITH THE REST OF THE OLD TRINITY AND TURNED THEM INTO THE BUTT-VICEROY, I GUESS ONLY THE CHICKEN KNOWS WHERE JESUS' MORNING WOOD IS NOW?




...UH, RIGHT. HE HAS **ENTIRELY** DIFFERENT ANATOMY NOW. AND MY BROTHER STILL REACTS TO BEING CONTRADICTED THE WAY HE ALWAYS HAS.

IF I HAD A NICKEL FOR EVERY TIME HE SAID I HAD NO MORALS... NO, ENOUGH ABOUT HIM.



IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE GETTING TO THE GOOD PART, AND I HATE TO INTERRUPT, BUT... IS THERE ANY WAY TO GET SOME FOOD HERE BEFORE YOU CONTINUE? IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE CALVIN AND I ATE, AND I'M AT LEAST HUNGRY FOR SOMETHING THAT'S NOT WAFFLES OR SOUP.



THIS STORY **HAS** TAKEN A WHILE, HASN'T IT? BUT THE CELESTIAL BUREAUCRACY DID LET YOU IN, AND, AS MORTALS, YOU CAN EAT THE SAME FOOD AS ONI. SOME OF THEIR RESTAURANTS TAKE PRIDE IN BREAKING THE CHICKEN'S FOOD COMMANDMENTS, TOO. WE CAN TELL THE REST OF THE STORY THERE.



WE GOT A FEW FOOD VOUCHERS FROM TIFFANY BEFORE WE PULLED YOU HERE, JUST IN CASE. AND THE NEAREST RESTAURANTS ARE WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE, SO WE WON'T HAVE TO GO THERE BY MAGIC CARPET.



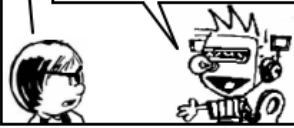
YEP. HERE THEY ARE!

FOLLOW ME. IT'S ALL TOO EASY TO GET LOST WHEN YOU'RE NOT NATIVE TO THIS PLANE OF EXISTENCE.



BRIAN'S NOT A GHOST. WHAT DOES HE EAT? AND DO ROBOTS EVEN HAVE GHOSTS?

I HAVE ADAPTED TO THIS PLANE. I CAN OBTAIN ALL ENERGY I NEED BY ABSORBING THE AMBIENT ECTOPLASM PRODUCED BY GHOSTS HERE.



AND YES, ROBOTS CAN HAVE GHOSTS. MANY OF MY PEOPLE BECAME GHOSTS WHEN THEY WERE SCATTERED INTO HOSTILE AREAS OF THE MULTIVERSE. I WAS LUCKY TO END UP HERE INSTEAD, WHERE I CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

COOL. RIDING A MAGIC CARPET WOULD HAVE BEEN COOL, TOO.

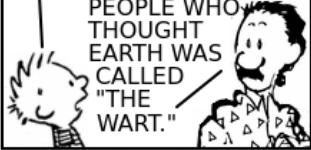


YOU'RE THINKING FLYING MAGIC CARPETS. THE ONES I'M TALKING ABOUT ARE WISHING CARPETS THAT TELEPORT YOU INSTANTLY. THEY'RE MORE COMMON IN BIGGER REGIONS LIKE THE HEAVENS AND HELLS. EVERYONE HERE KNOWS ABOUT THEM AFTER THE STORMFIELD INCIDENT AWHILE BACK, WHEN HE USED ONE OF THEM TO GET HOME.



WHAT'S THAT?

A CAPTAIN STORMFIELD WENT OFF COURSE TRYING TO GET TO HIS RIGHTFUL HEAVEN. HE ENDED UP AT A HEAVEN FOR SKY-BLUE, ONE-LEGGED, SEVEN-HEADED PEOPLE WHO THOUGHT EARTH WAS CALLED "THE WART."



AND, IN CASE YOU'RE WONDERING, NOT ALL HELLS RUN ON ETERNAL PUNISHMENT. ONLY THE UNJUST ONES RUN BY GODS LIKE THE LUMBER-CHICKEN AND THE BUTT-VICEROY. (THOSE TWO DESERVE EACH OTHER.) THE JUST ONES HAVE FINITE PUNISHMENTS FOR FINITE CRIMES, AND MERCY WHEN IT APPLIES. IT WAS A RELIEF TO FIND THAT OUT.

BUT IF YOU WANT TO EAT ANYTIME SOON, WE REALLY SHOULD STOP TALKING AND START WALKING.

YES, LET'S GO!



MOVEMENT IS CRAZY HERE. I SWEAR THAT BACKWARDS "NOSRETTAW" GRAFFITI DISAPPEARED JUST BEFORE WE STARTED WALKING, BUT NOW IT'S BACK!



YOU GHOSTS' FLOATING UP AND DOWN I CAN DEAL WITH, EVEN IF IT LOOKS LIKE YOU GROW AND SHRINK IN PLACE SOMETIMES. WOULD IT BE EASIER IF I WERE A GHOST, TOO?



MAYBE. I'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE, AND I'M NOT ALL THAT USED TO IT. MAYBE IF WE HAD MINI STABILIZER JETS LIKE THE ONES BRIAN SPROUTED ON LIFTOFF...



I SEE THE SIGNS. THE NEAREST ONE IS FOR A PIZZERIA CLAIMING TO BREAK ALL COMMANDMENTS IN THE 40700S. I FIND IT INTERESTING THAT THERE ARE EXACTLY ONE HUNDRED COMMANDMENTS THAT DEAL WITH PIZZA.

WE FINALLY REACHED A MASSIVE FLOATING CHUNK OF GROUND WITH A ROW OF BUILDINGS ON IT. SUSIE HANDED SARANNA AND ME OUR VOUCHERS, AND I LOOKED AT MINE CLOSELY.

WHAT'S THIS? "BREAKING COMMANDMENT 56943 WILL RESULT IN THE CLIENT'S BEING BANNED."



I'VE NEVER HEARD OF THAT ONE!

IT'S OBSCURE. "THOU SHALT NOT TRAFFIC IN LAPIS LAZULI FROM DEMONIC MUSQUASH PEOPLE."

WHAT'S THAT ABOUT?



MAX: SHORT VERSION: CELESTIALS AND DEMONS HAVE BEEN AT WAR FOR AGES. CELESTIALS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ASCEND TO GODHOOD MORE, SO THEY HAVE BETTER P.R. AND TEND TO PAINT DEMONS AS EVIL. BUT IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE. SARANNA: THE CHICKEN IS AN ASCENDED CELESTIAL, AND HE'S NOT GOOD. MAX: RIGHT. THERE ARE OTHER CELESTIALS AND DEMONS, IN A VARIETY OF FORMS. AND SOME ARE IN MORE HUMANIZED FORMS, FROM CELESTIAL IBEX-PEOPLE TO DEMONIC MUSQUASH PEOPLE. CALVIN: GOAT-PEOPLE AND RODENT PEOPLE? WOW. I WONDER HOW MANY OTHERS THERE ARE!

LOTS. SO ONE LEADER OF THE MUSQUASH PEOPLE TRIED BUYING HIS WAY TO GODHOOD WITH LAPIS LAZULI HE'D GOTTEN FROM A MINE HE OWNED. BUT IT WAS ALL GLAMOURED BLUE COPROLITES FROM DEMONIC DEER PEOPLE HE'D ENSLAVED AND WORKED TO DEATH. IT WAS SUCH A SCANDAL THAT THE WOULD-BE GOD'S NAME WAS ERASED FROM ALL RECORDS, AND IT BLEW BACK ON HIS SPECIES.

SO TRYING TO PAY FOR FOOD BY PASSING FOSSILIZED POOP OFF AS GEMSTONES WILL GET YOU BANNED FROM ONI RESTAURANTS? THAT IS OBSCURE. BUT ONLY FRESH DEER POOP IS BLUE, FROM FROM WHEN THEY EAT A LOT OF BERRIES!



OF COURSE YOU'D KNOW ABOUT GROSS THINGS LIKE POOP FOSSILS AND COLORS!

YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED THAT MUCH!



I WAS CURIOUS, TOO. THE FOSSILS ABSORBED BLUE AGATE, WHICH MADE THEM BLUE AGAIN, SO THE GLAMOUR DIDN'T HAVE TO DO AS MUCH WORK. THE MUSQUASH LEADER MADE BLUE HIS OFFICIAL COLOR, AND HIS FOLLOWERS ALL HAD TO WEAR BLUE GINGHAM OUTFITS AND ARMY BOOTS, AND WERE BARRED FROM DANCING THE JITTERBUG.

OH, THOSE MUSQUASHES! THE ONE INSULT MY COUSIN WOULD LET ME USE WAS CALLING SOMEONE A "BLUE GINGHAM MUSQUASH," SINCE PRETENDING TO BE RICH TO GET POWER WAS ONE OF THE WORST THINGS YOU COULD DO! IT'S THE ONE THING THE CHICKEN WOULD NEVER FORGIVE. NOT THAT HE EVER FORGIVES MUCH, EXCEPT IN RARE CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT STILL!





WELCOME TO
MCZARGALD'S.
MAY I TAKE
YOUR OR-
DER?

AFTER WE
DECIDED
WHAT WE
WANTED
TO EAT...

WE NON-LIVING AREN'T
HAVING ANYTHING. I'M
THE CHAPERONE, AND
WE'RE ALL FAMILY. TWO
VOUCHERS HERE: THEY
WILL HAVE A HAMBURGER
WITH MAYONNAISE AND
EXTRA PICKLES, AND A
CHEESEBURGER WITH
SWISS CHEESE AND KET-
CHUP. AND... NO
SPECIAL MEAT,
IF YOU WOULD.
THANKS. TWO
CHOCOLATE
MILKS, AS WELL.



THE MENU SAYS THE
TONKOTSU BURGERS
ARE MADE WITH PORK,
AND THE SABAMISO
ONES ARE MADE WITH
MACKEREL. WHAT'S
SPECIAL MEAT? IS IT
HAMBURGER MEAT MADE
OUT OF PEOPLE FROM
HAMBURG?

CLOSE. IT'S
MADE OUT
OF HUMAN
CRIMINALS.
AN ONI
DELI-
CACY.

WE'RE NOT CRIMINALS,
RIGHT? EVEN THOUGH I'M
BREAKING COMMANDMENT
73, AND SARANNA'S BREA-
KING COMMANDMENT 97
BY EATING A CHEESEBUR-
GER WITH SWISS CHEESE?

NO. THE CHICKEN'S
FOOD CRIMES DON'T
COUNT FOR
THAT.



**TECHNICALLY, YOU ARE ALSO
BREAKING COMMANDMENT
72 DUE TO EATING A HAM-
BURGER WITH EXTRA MAYO-
NAISE AT ALL. BUT MANY
COMMANDMENTS HAVE SUCH
REDUNDANCY. I ALSO DISLIKE
BEING CALLED NON-LIVING,
JUST BECAUSE THIS DIMEN-
SION ASSUMES ALL LIFE IS
BIOLOGICAL. HAS THE TRANS-
DIMENSIONAL ROBOT LOBBY
MADE ANY PROGRESS THERE?**



NOT YET. BUT DON'T
WORRY, BRIAN. IT'S MO-
VING THROUGH THE BU-
REAUCRACY, AND IF WE
HAVE TO TAKE IT ALL THE
WAY TO THE PLEROMA
COUNCIL AT THE TOP TO
GET IT DONE, WE WILL!



SO SOME PEOPLE STILL
FIND WAYS TO PUT EACH
OTHER DOWN, EVEN
HERE.

UNFORTUNATELY. BUT
WE KEEP ON TRYING
TO IMPROVE. IT'S ALL
WE CAN DO.



THERE WAS LESS OF THAT
IN THE NEW LIBERTY TOWN
I WAS IN. IT TURNED OUT
THAT THE TOWNIES WHO'D
BACKSTAB YOU AND EACH
OTHER WHILE HIDING BE-
HIND A FAKE NICE ACT
USED TO DOMINATE, JUST
LIKE IN THE OLD TOWN,
BUT THEY GOT EFFECTIVE-
LY WIPED OUT.

HOW'D THAT
HAPPEN?



SOMEONE SET UP A HOT-
LINE THAT PEOPLE COULD
USE TO ANONYMOUSLY
TURN OTHER PEOPLE IN
FOR PRACTICING "POLITI-
CALLY DANGEROUS RELI-
GIONS." NOT THAT THE
TOWN DIDN'T HAVE ITS
SHARE OF THAT. EVEN
THOUGH CHICKENISM WAS
EVERYWHERE OUTSIDE THE
TOWN, SOME INSIST-
ED ON TRYING TO
BRING IT INSIDE, EV-
EN THOUGH THE CHI-
CKEN FORBADE IT
AS A FAITH TEST.



IT WAS REALLY SO COM-
MON THAT THEY NEEDED
A HOTLINE FOR IT?

NO, BUT A COMBINA-
TION OF NOT NEED-
ING EVIDENCE, ONLY
ACCUSATION, AND
THE TOWNIES' LOVE
OF GOSSIPING ALONG
WITH BACKSTABBING
SEALED THEIR
FATES.



MOST OF THE TOWNIES
GLEEFULLY TURNED IN
THEIR OWN NEIGHBORS,
SOME OVER ACTUAL OFF-
ENSES, BUT MOST OVER
MADE-UP OFFENSES TO
GET MORE STATUS FOR
THEMSELVES, AND THE
THE ENTIRE TOWN EN-
DED UP IMPRISONED FOR
YEARS, IF NOT LIFE. EX-
CEPT FOR A FEW LUCKY
ONES, BUT THEY
WERE **SO FEW**
THAT THINGS
FELL APART.



BUT THEY PUT
THINGS BACK
TOGETHER BY
THE TIME YOU
GOT THERE?

BY IMPORTING NEW PEO-
PLE TO REPLACE THE IM-
PRISONED ONES, WHO
WERE EITHER CIVILIZED
ENOUGH TO HAVE SOME
LOYALTY TO FELLOW PEO-
PLE OR SMART EN-
OUGH TO HOLD
THEMSELVES BACK
FROM GOING
AFTER EV-
ERYONE.



THERE WERE RUMORS
THAT THE HOTLINE HAD
BEEN STARTED BY AN OUT-
SIDER WHO'D BEEN TAR-
GETED TOO MANY TIMES
AND FIGURED THEY COULD
USE THE TOWNIES' CRAB
BUCKET CULTURE AGAINST
THEM. NO ONE COULD
PROVE IT, BUT IT SERVED
AS A WARNING FROM THEN
ON AND KEPT THEM
IN LINE. LUCKY FOR
ME AND OTHERS LIKE
ME. BUT I THINK IT
WAS MORE THAN
LUCK.

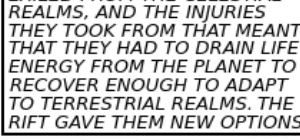


WHAT MAKES YOU SO
CERTAIN THIS TIME?

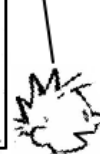
ENOUGH THINGS
WORKED OUT THAT I
FIGURED IT COULDN'T
BE RANDOM. I HAD TO
GET TWO JOBS TO SUR-
VIVE, BUT BOTH OF
THEM LED ME THE
RIGHT WAY IN THE
LONG TERM.



MAX: THE FIRST WAS PILOTING
FASTER-THAN-LIGHT SPACE-
CRAFT. THERE WAS A POPULA-
TION OF CELESTIAL DINOSAUR
PEOPLE IN TOWN. THEY'D
COME THROUGH A LOCAL RIFT,
LEAVING BEHIND A MASSIVE
SELF-CONTAINED CITY ON A
PLANET THAT WAS OTHERWISE
LITTLE MORE THAN DESERT.
THEY WERE TIGHT-LIPPED
ABOUT WHAT LED THEM HERE.
MY COWORKER AND TEACHER,
KRALTAR, SAID THEY'D BEEN
EXILED FROM THE CELESTIAL
REALMS, AND THE INJURIES
THEY TOOK FROM THAT MEANT
THAT THEY HAD TO DRAIN LIFE
ENERGY FROM THE PLANET TO
RECOVER ENOUGH TO ADAPT
TO TERRESTRIAL REALMS. THE
RIFT GAVE THEM NEW OPTIONS.



CELESTIAL WHY DID
DINOSAUR THEY NEED
PEOPLE IN PILOTS FROM
SPACE EARTH?
CRAFT? MANY OF
WOW! THEIR PILOTS
DIED BEFORE
THEY COULD
ADAPT, AND
THEY WERE
AT WAR, IT
TURNED
OUT.



WHAT KIND OF WAR?

WITH CELESTIAL BIRD-
PEOPLE. THE SAME ONES
WHO, AFTER EXILING
THEM, ACHIEVED ULTI-
MATE POWER OVER
EARTH'S SOLAR SYSTEM
BY DRAINING LIFE FORCE
FROM THE REST OF
THEIR SPECIES, PLUS
EXTRA POWER FROM ANY
SOURCE THEY
CONSIDERED EXP-
PENDABLE.

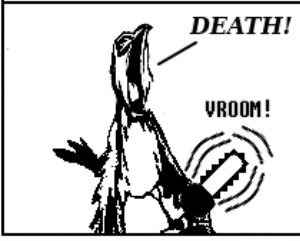


I THOUGHT YOU SAID
THEY WERE TIGHT-
LIPPED ABOUT IT.

KRALTAR AND I BON-
DED AFTER AWHILE.
FOR ONE THING, WE
HAD BOTH LOST
FAMILY TO THEM, E-
VEN THOUGH I'D
ONLY HAD TO
DEAL WITH
THE LUMBER-
CHICKEN.



MAX: HE WAS SURPRISED THAT
YALDABAARK WAS AT THE TOP
POSITION ON EARTH. AFTER
HOW THE WAR WENT, HE
THOUGHT SABAAWK, THE
CHAINSAWSHRIKE, WOULD BE
THERE, INSTEAD OF BEING DE-
MOTED TO THE ARCHON OF
MARS.



HOW DOES
IT HELP THEM
TO COME
HERE, THEN,
SINCE THEIR
ENEMY RUNS
THIS WORLD?

THE MORE POWER
THEY SPEND ON CON-
TROL, THE LESS
THEY HAVE FOR
WAR, IT SEEMS.



ORDER 127 IS READY.

BUT THERE'S THE FOOD NOW. WE SHOULD GRAB IT BEFORE I GO ON.

I'LL GET THE TRAYS, YOU FIND AN EMPTY TABLE. RIGHT.

THE RECEIPT "HELPFULLY" STATES THAT THE ORDER NUMBER IS THE SAME AS THE COMMANDMENT AGAINST EATING CORN-BREAD WITH STRAWBERRY PRESERVES, WHICH IS ONE OF THE DESSERTS OFFERED HERE.

ONI GRUDGES ARE LEGENDARY.

MY PEOPLE'S ALSO TEND TO BE. I OCCASIONALLY RECEIVE MESSAGES VIA MY BUILT-IN ANSIBLE FROM SURVIVORS IN OTHER REALITIES. G-LQGGMQLHNDHH-335699-1401692966795814850-3112593673240522968, WHOM I WILL CALL "GARY" FOR YOUR SAKE, IS IN AN APPARENTLY EMPTY REGION, AND DISLIKES HIS ISOLATION.

BRIAN: HE VERBALLY LASHES OUT WHEN IT BECOMES TOO MUCH.

293572864995275718-1620765702050971956-2456325417772429254-3778720955674574352-4067559447090215861-1401675925836037854-3658275965819969478-3799810817798763790-3855184240856587587-3217256647013370333-3907771557247536430-4119052946164146424-2430065659573148820-4048537645834347411!

THAT IS OBSCENE, ANATOMICALLY IMPOSSIBLE, AND OVERLY LIMITED TO UNSIGNED SIXTY-FOUR-BIT VALUES.

THANKS. IT'S NICE TO BE ABLE TO RELAX WITH SOME COMFORT FOOD.

YES, THANKS. BUT I CAN FEEL THAT PRESENCE AGAIN.

GHARG!

BOING!

NO DIVINE INTERFERENCE WITH DINERS!

LOOK OUT THE WINDOW! THAT POTTED SPIDER PLANT TOOK THE BOLT INSTEAD AND TURNED INTO A PILE OF ROTINI!

I'VE NEVER SEEN THE BARRIER KICK IN FOR THAT BEFORE! IT MOSTLY BLOCKS THE GRAFFITI FOR "NOSRETTAW," SINCE A LOT OF THAT'S FULLY OR PARTIALLY INSCRIBED VIA NON-ONI MAGIC. SO YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL US AT SOME POINT, CALVIN!

HE TOLD ME SOON AFTER WE MET. THE SHORT VERSION IS THAT THE FLYING SPAGHETTI MONSTER IS UNHAPPY WITH HIM.

I'VE DEALT WITH A LOT. ERIS WORKED OUT BETTER, FOR ONE.

GO ON WITH YOUR STORY, AND HE'LL TELL HIS IN DUE TIME. BESIDES, IT WOULD TAKE LONG ENOUGH TO MAKE OUR BURGERS GET LUKEWARM.

YES. MMMM...

SQUISH!

AND SHOULDN'T YOU THREE SIT DOWN TOO? OR DOES YOUR NATURAL FLOATING MEAN YOU DON'T HAVE TO? MAX'S LAST VISIT WASN'T LONG ENOUGH TO NEED THAT, BUT THIS ONE MIGHT BE. YUM...

SQUISH!

MAX: THE FLOATING MEANS WE DON'T HAVE TO SIT, BUT WE CAN AT LEAST FLOAT OVER CHAIRS.

CALVIN: AND WE KNOW WHAT BRIAN LIVES ON NOW, BUT WHAT DO GHOSTS EAT?

MAX: SPIRITUAL FOOD, BUT IT'S MORE ABOUT THE JOY OF IT THAN THE NEED OF IT.

SUSIE: I MAY HAVE TO TRY THE SPIRITUAL VERSION OF YOUR BURGER SOMETIME, SARANNA, AFTER WE CATCH UP ON EVERYTHING ELSE.

SARANNA: DO ROBOTS ENJOY EATING ANYTHING, BRIAN?

BRIAN: SOME THINGS, WHEN I CHEMICALLY ANALYZE THEM, CAN BE GOOD. MANY OF THE BANNED FOODS ARE, SUCH AS HAM AND PINEAPPLE PIZZAS.

I RAN INTO A TOWNIE ONCE WHO'D HAD A HAM, PINEAPPLE, JALAPEÑO, MUSHROOM, AND ANCHOVY PIZZA. SHE CALLED IT A SEVENFOLD BECAUSE IT BROKE SEVEN PIZZA COMMANDMENTS, WHICH WAS A RECORD.

BUT TO GET BACK TO MY STORY, THE CELESTIAL DINOSAUR PEOPLE NEEDED FASTER-THAN-LIGHT CRAFTS TO GET OUT OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM AND ESCAPE THEIR ENEMIES' WRATH ENTIRELY. EARTH WAS JUST A PIT STOP ON THE WAY.

MAX: EVEN SO, THEIR OLD WORLD STILL HAD SOME PEOPLE AND THINGS THAT NEEDED SAVING, SO KRALTAR AND I TOOK A FEW FLIGHTS THERE AND BACK.

BLARZZZ!

ARE YOU SURE WE CAN GET THROUGH THE RIFT THIS WAY?

YES, MAX. STEALTH MODE IS ON.

WE CAN'T JUST DO THIS ON FOOT? WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

THEIR SAFETY IS PARAMOUNT!

IF THE CHICKEN OR HIS AGENTS GET AHOOLD OF THEM, WE ARE ALL DOOMED! YOUR BEING INFUSED WITH OUR DNA MAKES YOU RESIST HIS BRAINWASHING, AND GETS YOU PAST OUR GENETIC LOCKOUTS, BUT WE CANNOT DO IT FOR EVERYONE. THE MAGUS IS TOO IMPORTANT TO RISK LOSING!

NOT TO MENTION HIS REMAINING FAMILY! WHEN HE VISITED EARTH LAST TIME IN AN ILLUSORY HUMAN FORM WHEN THE OLD TRINITY WAS YOUNG, THEY CAPTURED HIS MATE, WHOM WE HAVE YET TO FIND!

WHO WAS HE?

HE STILL GOES BY SIMON MAGUSSAURUS, BUT YOU'D KNOW HIM AS SIMON MAGUS. I'VE HEARD OF HIM, YES.

ACCORDING TO OUR BOOKS, HE OFFERED TO PAY JESUS' FOLLOWERS TO TEACH HIM THEIR DIVINELY-GRANTED POWERS, BUT THEY REFUSED TO BE BOUGHT.

BOOKS THEY WROTE, OF COURSE, LONG AFTER THE FACT.

AND THEN THEY SET THEMSELVES UP AS THE OFFICIAL RELIGION OF AN EMPIRE AND GLUTTED THEMSELVES ON AS MUCH AUTHORITY AND MONEY AS THEY COULD GET! IT WAS NOT ABOUT ANY PRINCIPLE OTHER THAN... HOW DO YOU SAY IT? REFUSING TO SHARE THE PIE?

AND THESE SAME BOOKS CALL THEIR RELIGION MONOTHEISTIC, DESPITE ITS BEING A TRINITY, WHICH MAKES NO SENSE AT ALL!

RELAX. REMEMBER, I'M ON YOUR SIDE, NOT THEIRS.

I APOLOGIZE. IT IS FRUSTRATING. IF OUR ATTEMPT TO TURN YOU AWAY FROM CELESTIAL-BIRD-STYLE THOUGHT HAD WORKED THEN... WE'D BE MUCH BETTER OFF NOW.

BESIDES, THAT LEVEL OF CORRUPTION TOOK CENTURIES TO COME ABOUT. A FEW BLINKS OF AN EYE FOR YOUR KIND, BUT GENERATIONS FOR MINE.

RIGHT. I FORGET SOMETIMES. BUT IT'S DIFFERENT FOR YOU, NOW.

THAT INFUSION OF OUR DNA SHOULD INCREASE YOUR NATURAL LIFESPAN, AS WELL. ODD HOW ONLY A FEW GENES CAN MAKE SUCH A DIFFERENCE, AND YET ARE UNDETECTABLE WITHOUT THE PROPER SCAN. IN MANY WAYS, YOU ARE EFFECTIVELY ONE OF US.

SO IF YOU HAD TO EAT ME, WOULD IT COUNT AS CANNIBALISM?

NO ONE HAS EVER ASKED ME THAT BEFORE! I GUESS?

I'M SURE YALDA-BAAWK KILLED JESUS AND THE OTHER TWO JUST AFTER HE TOOK OVER. NO, HE TURNED THEM ALL INTO A TRIPLE-HEADED BUTT. SO HE'S GOTTEN CRAZIER!

MORE THAN THAT: THE TRIPLE BUTT LEADS THE CHICKEN'S BUTT-ARMY, AND BRAINWASHES PEOPLE ON HIS BEHALF!

GNOSIS PRESERVE US! HE STILL HAS THAT FIXATION!

I KNOW NOT WHY MAMMALIAN SPHINCTERS FASCINATE HIM, BUT HE'S PROBABLY FOUND A NEW WAY TO EXECUTE ENEMIES USING THEM. HE'S ALWAYS COME UP WITH SPECIAL WAYS TO DO THAT. DO YOU KNOW WHAT HE USED TO DO IN THE OLD DAYS?

BEFORE HE GOT HIS AXE? YOU'VE TOLD ME SOME STORIES, YES.

HAVE I MENTIONED THE HEART THING?

NO, BUT THAT INCIDENT IN THE DINER WITH THE GIRL WHO SAID "I'LL GIVE YOU MY HEART..."

YES.

HE'D MAKE SOME BAD HEART-RELATED PUN, SHOOT HIS HEART OUT OF HIS CHEST LIKE A CANNONBALL, BLOW MASSIVE HOLES IN PEOPLE WITH IT, AND THEN GLOAT ABOUT HOW INFERIOR THEY WERE FOR DYING. "BEWARE OF CHICKENS SHARING HEARTS," WE SAY NOW.

I SUPPOSE HIS HEART FUSED BACK INTO HIS CHEST AFTERWARD? OR DID HE MAKE HIMSELF LITERALLY HEARTLESS?

YES TO THE FIRST. HE KILLED ANYONE WHO REFERRED TO HIM AS THE SECOND.

ANOTHER REASON WHY THERE ARE SO FEW CELESTIAL BIRD PEOPLE IS BECAUSE HE KILLED MANY OF THEM FOR MAKING FUN OF HIM WHEN HE WAS YOUNG AND PRACTICING THE HEART THING. AS SOON AS HE GOT HIS AXE, ANYONE WHO CALLED HIM "HEART-FALL-OUT-BOY" WAS CHOPPED UP BY IT.

LIKE DARKSEID FROM OUR COMICS, WHO WAS ORIGINALLY NAMED UXAS? AHD WHO PROBABLY KILLED EVERYONE WHO... BOOK-ENDED IT WITH S'S?

I BELIEVE SO.

EVER SINCE HE GOT HIS AXE, WHICH HE PROCLAIMED MADE HIM A... WHAT'S YOUR TERM? BAD BUTTOCK? HE HAS BECOME MORE AND MORE UNHINGED. BUT HIS SLIPPING GRASP ON REALITY ONLY HELPS US.

WHY THE SUDDEN RUSH TO LEAVE? YOU WERE TAKING THINGS SLOWLY UNTIL A FEW WEEKS AGO.

WE DISCOVERED A CAVE WITH A DEAD ROBOT AND A MESSAGE INSIDE IT.

THE ROBOT IS TOO OLD TO HAVE HAD ITS LIFE FORCE DRAINED BY OUR ADAPTATION TO THIS MORTAL PLANE, AND NO ONE HAS BEEN ABLE TO TRANSLATE THE MESSAGE. THE DINO DIRECTORATE HAS ERRED ON THE SIDE OF CAUTION AND ASSUMED IT IS A WARNING.

MAX: HE TOLD ME WHAT THE MESSAGE WAS, AND I MEMORIZED IT JUST IN CASE IT WAS WHAT THEY THOUGHT. UNTIL BRIAN CAME ALONG MUCH LATER AND TURNED OUT TO BE ABLE TO TRANSLATE IT. BRIAN: IT WAS **NOT** WHAT THEY THOUGHT. "4275548363515100518-2949344473369913669-2414547585330888269-2456798540937331348-3855485086787626942-2476998798257491054" IS MERELY A STATEMENT OF DIS-ORIENTATION. THE WORST THING IN IT IS A VULGARITY INVOLVING OUR EVIL GOD OF, AMONG OTHER THINGS, IN-COMPETENT DESIGN.

YOU'RE PART DINOSAUR AND HELPING MAGICAL HERETIC DINOSAURS ESCAPE THE LUMBERCHICKEN IN SPACE? THAT IS SO COOL! IS ANYONE GOING TO TEACH US ROBOT-SPEAK?

BRIAN TAUGHT ME. HIS PEOPLE ARE A LITTLE TOO FOUL-MOUTHED FOR THAT.

MAX: YOU'LL LEARN IT EVENTUALLY. OUR DISAPPOINTMENTS ARE HARDER TO TAKE WHEN WE DON'T KNOW ANY CURSES BAD ENOUGH FOR THEM.

SPEAKING OF MATES, HOW IS YOURS DOING? SKIRRA IS RECOVERING NICELY.



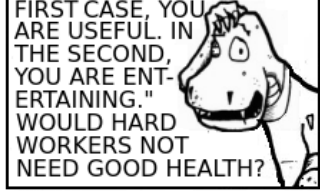
YOUR SECOND JOB AS A CAREGIVER AND NON-DE-NOMINATIONAL COUNSELOR MEANS YOU DEAL WITH HEALTH CARE SOMETIMES, YES? WHY IS YOURS SO MUCH WORSE THAN OURS, EVEN IN A LIBERTY TOWN OUTSIDE YALDABAABWK'S CONTROL?



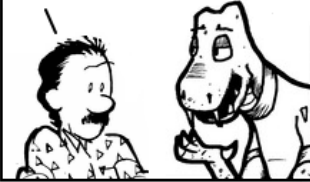
I ONLY DEAL WITH IT WHEN TRYING TO SUPPORT MY CLIENTS. IT'S FOR MORALE, NOTHING MORE. BUT THE ENTIRE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IS CONTROLLED AT THE TOP BY HIS FOUR HEALERS, LIBERTY TOWN OR NOT.



THE RELIGION OF JESUS AND THE OTHER TWO COMMANDED PEOPLE TO WORK FOR A LIVING, WHETHER IT WAS NECESSARY OR NOT. YALDABAABWK EXTENDED IT TO "WORK OR DIE. IN THE FIRST CASE, YOU ARE USEFUL. IN THE SECOND, YOU ARE ENTERTAINING." WOULD HARD WORKERS NOT NEED GOOD HEALTH?



THEY DO, BUT THE PEOPLE IN CHARGE DON'T THINK STRAIGHT AND ACT AS THOUGH THEY HAVE AN INFINITE SUPPLY OF WORKERS TO USE UP.



UNTIL THEY LEARN OTHERWISE, THE HARD WAY.

THERE ARE EXCEPTIONS. PEOPLE CAN GO ON DISABILITY, BUT IT'S A CRAPSHOOT WHETHER THEY ACTUALLY GET IT. THE NEED FOR IT DOESN'T MATTER MUCH TO THE PEOPLE IN CHARGE, EITHER.

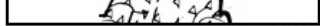


DOES GETTING IT RELY ON WHETHER YALDABAABWK'S POOP STICKS TO THE WALL WHEN HE LAUNCHES IT, OR DID YOU MEAN "CRAPSHOOT" IN THE GENERAL SENSE?



...MAYBE BOTH.

THOSE DEFECTORS FROM THE CELESTIAL BIRD PEOPLE SURE TOLD YOU A LOT. IT'S A SHAME THAT THEY'RE ALL DEAD NOW. TALK OF HEALTH CARE ALSO WORRIES ME. I NEVER GOT SICK ENOUGH TO NEED IT MUCH, BUT A CLIENT OF MINE'S MATE DID, AND IT'S BAD.



YOU KNEW YOUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEM WAS BAD GOING IN, YES?

I DID, BUT... I THOUGHT SOME OF THE ACCOUNTS OF IT HAD TO BE EXAGGERATED!



I CAN'T GIVE NAMES, BUT MY CLIENT'S LUCKY ENOUGH TO COUNT AS DISABLED. HIS MATE, ON THE OTHER HAND, **SHOULD** COUNT, BUT EVERYONE THEY CAN GET TO REFUSES TO DO THE TESTING, AND SHE JUST KEEPS FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS.



IS THIS NOT LIKE YOUR FOOD QUEST IN THE LAST LIBERTY TOWN? THEY CAN PAY, BUT NO ONE HAS TO DO WHAT THEY'RE PAID TO DO, SOMEHOW?



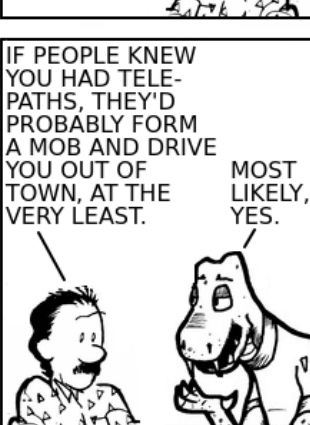
RIGHT. IT'S NOT JUST DISABILITY.

A LOT OF PEOPLE LIVING IN THEIR PART OF TOWN SINCE THE INCIDENT HAVE COME DOWN WITH ARJENFLORB SYNDROME.



THE SO-CALLED LOWER CLASS DISEASE?

YES, THAT ONE. THE ORCS GOT IT FIRST, FOLLOWED BY THE HUMAN-ORC HYBRIDS, FOLLOWED BY OTHER HUMANS. THE COMMON KNOWLEDGE IS THAT IT'S AN ORC AND LOWER-CLASS HUMAN DISEASE, BUT IT CROPS UP MORE IN THEM BECAUSE OF THEIR BAD LIVING CONDITIONS, WHICH SET IT OFF IN WAYS I DON'T UNDERSTAND.



A FEW OF OUR TELEPATHS HAVE PICKED UP ON ANTI-ORC SENTIMENTS. A PERSISTENT BELIEF IS THAT THE ORCS SECRETLY SERVE YALDABAABWK, SINCE THEY ARE DESCENDED FROM DUNGEON GOBLINS WHO DO. OUR TELEPATHS CAN SHOW THIS IS NOT THE CASE, BUT FEW LISTEN TO US, OTHER THAN THOSE LIKE YOU.

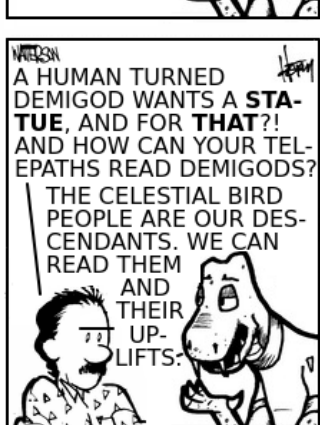


TELEPATHY STILL MAKES ME NERVOUS, FOR BOTH MYSELF AND THE OTHERS YOUR KIND CAN READ.

WORRY NOT. OUR DNA IN YOU SHIELDS YOU FROM IT, FOR ONE THING.



AS FOR OTHERS, IT IS NOT A DELIBERATE VIOLATION OF PRIVACY. THE ONES MAKING THEMSELVES HEARD ARE DOING THE MENTAL EQUIVALENT OF SHOUTING WHILE THREE FEET AWAY. IT IS NOT EAVES-DROPPING TO HEAR EVERYTHING THEY SAY UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES.



IF PEOPLE KNEW YOU HAD TELEPATHS, THEY'D PROBABLY FORM A MOB AND DRIVE YOU OUT OF TOWN, AT THE VERY LEAST.

MOST LIKELY, YES.

BUT IT'S TOO USEFUL TO IGNORE, AS IT HELPS US SURVIVE. DID YOU KNOW THAT ONE OF YOUR "HOLY DOCTORS" GOT NEAR ONE OF OUR TELEPATHS ONCE? WE GOT GREAT INSIGHT INTO HOW THEY INTERPRET THE WORLD.

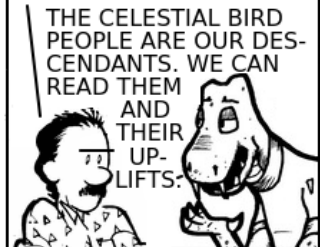


DARE I ASK HOW?

THE THOUGHT WAS: "I AM MERCIFUL! I COULD REMOVE THOSE UNWORTHY OF LIFE BY KILLING THEM, BUT I STAND BACK INSTEAD! I COULD SAY THEY ALL HAVE "SLUGGISH SCHIZOPHRENIA," BUT I SAVE THAT FOR THE ONES WHO **REALLY** OFFEND ME! AND IS THERE EVEN **ONE** STATUE OF ME ON EARTH?!"



A HUMAN TURNED DEMIGOD WANTS A **STATUE**, AND FOR **THAT**?! AND HOW CAN YOUR TELEPATHS READ DEMIGODS?



THE CELESTIAL BIRD PEOPLE ARE OUR DESCENDANTS. WE CAN READ THEM AND THEIR UP-LIFTS:

SINCE I HAVE YOUR DNA, AM I AN UPLIFT OF YOURS, THAT CELESTIAL DINO-SAUROUS PEOPLE CAN READ? YES, BUT WE COULD READ YOU BEFORE THAT. DOING SO IS HOW WE KNEW YOU WERE TRUSTWORTHY.



I'M NOT SURE I LIKE THAT. I'M AWARE. BUT WE, AND ALL THOSE WITH OUR DNA, ARE ONE OF THE FEW CELESTIAL SPECIES WITH RESISTANCE TO CELESTIAL BIRD POWERS, SINCE THEY DERIVE FROM OUR POWERS.



EVEN YALDABAABWK, DESPITE HIS ASCENSION TO DEMIURGE, CANNOT USE HIS FULL POWER AGAINST US. THUS, WE MUST SURVIVE, IF THIS REALITY IS TO ESCAPE HIS PEOPLE'S YOKE, NO PUN INTENDED.



IS THERE ANY WAY TO BE IMMUNE TO TELEPATHY? BE A TELEPATH YOURSELF AND BLOCK IT, OR HAVE A MIND THAT IS ALIEN OR INFLUENCED BY ALIEN POWERS.



THAT'S DISAPPOINTING. AND YOU SAID I'M RESISTANT TO CELESTIAL BIRD BRAINWASHING, BUT YALDABAABWK DOESN'T DO THAT HIMSELF ANYMORE. HE HAS HIS OLD TRINITY-TURNED-TRIPLE BUTT DO IT.



BUT A MIND TOO ALIEN FOR TELEPATHIC READING IS EASIER TO ACHIEVE THAN YOU THINK. YOUR SECOND JOB INVOLVES COUNSELING OF A SPIRITUAL NATURE, YES?



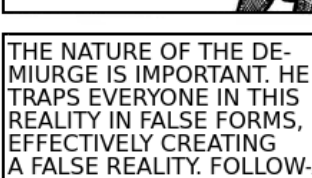
THEN YOU HAVE HEARD OF AMITABHA? HIS BROTHER AMOGHASIDDHI IS AN ENTITY SOME OF MY PEOPLE FOLLOW. AND THERE IS A VARIANT OF DISCORDIANISM SOME OF THEM FOLLOW AS WELL.



I'M NOT SURE "BROTHER" IS THE RIGHT TERM, AND THERE ARE SO MANY DISCORDIAN VARIANTS THAT I'VE LOST COUNT OF THEM.



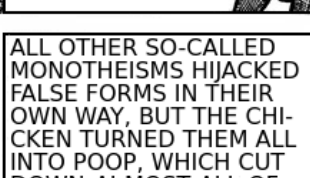
YOU KNOW OF GREY-FACES, WHO THINK ALL ORDER IS GOOD AND ALL CHAOS IS BAD, DISREGARDING THE CREATIVE AND DESTRUCTIVE SIDES OF BOTH THAT ERIS TELLS US OF? THE... BAD GUYS OF DISCORDIANISM? IN OUR VARIANT, THE DEMIURGE IS THE ULTIMATE GREY-FACE.



IMPOSING HIS OWN ORDER HARDER AND HARDER, AND GETTING HARDER AND HARDER BACKLASHES OF CHAOS? SOUNDS LIKE THE CHICKEN.



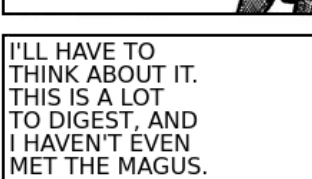
WHICH MAKES THIS REALITY GREYFACE HEAVEN, WHICH ALL NON-GREY-FACES WILL ESCAPE EVENTUALLY, EITHER WHEN ALL IS DESTROYED OR THEY FIND THEIR OWN WAYS OUT. NON-GREY-FACES ARE ALL HERE AGAINST THEIR WILL, AS TARGETS FOR THE GREYFACES.



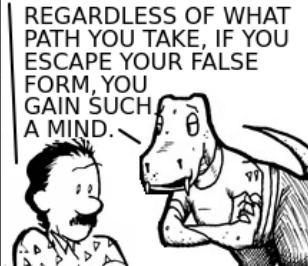
IT'S NOT GREY-FACE HEAVEN UNLESS THE GREYFACES HAVE NON-GREYFACES TO STOMP ON? WITHOUT THEM, WILL THE GREY-FACES STOMP ON EACH OTHER AND DESTROY THEMSELVES INSTEAD?



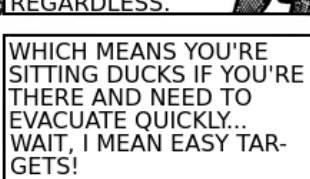
THE NATURE OF THE DEMIURGE IS IMPORTANT. HE TRAPS EVERYONE IN THIS REALITY IN FALSE FORMS, EFFECTIVELY CREATING A FALSE REALITY. FOLLOWERS OF AMITABHA, AMOGHASIDDHI, AND THEIR... ASSOCIATES FOCUS ON FALSE REALITY AND HOW TO ESCAPE IT MORE THAN ANY DEMIURGE.



THIS IS INTERESTING, BUT WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH GETTING AN TELEPATHICALLY-IMMUNE ALIEN MIND?



ALL OTHER SO-CALLED MONOTHEISMS HIJACKED FALSE FORMS IN THEIR OWN WAY, BUT THE CHICKEN TURNED THEM ALL INTO POOP, WHICH CUT DOWN ALMOST ALL OF OUR OTHER ENEMIES IN THIS. THOSE IN FALSE FORMS ARE REBORN IN THEM UNTIL THEY ARE FREED FROM THEM REGARDLESS.



THERE IS A WAY THAT YOU MIGHT FIND EASIER THAN OTHERS. THE MAGUS CAN SHOW YOU, IF YOU CAN CONVINCE HIM THAT YOU CAN PUT OTHERS ABOVE YOURSELF. A BODHISATTVA, A CHAOSATTVA, OR WHATEVER TERM YOU PREFER.



I'LL HAVE TO THINK ABOUT IT. THIS IS A LOT TO DIGEST, AND I HAVEN'T EVEN MET THE MAGUS.



THE PRIORITY RIGHT NOW IS TO GET HIM AND THE REST OF OUR PEOPLE TO THIS WORLD. OUR OLD WORLD IS STILL LIVABLE IF ONE REMAINS IN THE CITY, BUT THERE IS AN ENERGY FIELD AROUND IT THAT IMPEDES OUR FTL DRIVES.



WHICH MEANS YOU'RE SITTING DUCKS IF YOU'RE THERE AND NEED TO EVACUATE QUICKLY... WAIT, I MEAN EASY TARGETS!



I HAVE TALKED ENOUGH. YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THAT CLIENT OF YOURS AND HIS SHOULD-BE-DISABLED MATE, THOUGH THEY ARE NOT FAMILY OR FRIENDS?



COULDN'T YOU USE A LANGUAGE THE CHICKEN GOD WOULDN'T KNOW?

AND AMITABHA DIDN'T TALK MUCH ABOUT HIS OTHER ASSOCIATES, AT LEAST WHEN WE TALKED.

GODS CAN BE QUICK AT PICKING UP LANGUAGES. THE CHICKEN ALSO HAS ACCESS TO THE OLD TRINITY'S POWER OF SPEAKING IN TONGUES. IT WASN'T WORTH THE RISK.

BRIAN'S QUICK, TOO!



MAX TOLD ME ABOUT ONE OF CALVIN'S TEST ANSWERS. YAKKA FOOB MOG. GRUG PUBBAWUP ZINK WATTOOM GAZORK. CHUMBLE SPUZZ. IT IS SUCH A SUCCINCT DESCRIPTION OF WHAT YOU CALL NEWTON'S FIRST LAW, AS FOR AMOGHASIDDHI, HE IS GREEN WHERE AMITABHA IS RED, AND FOCUSES MORE ON VANQUISHING EVIL, BUT I DO NOT KNOW MUCH MORE.



WE DO NOT H JAPANESE PEA THEY ARE NO JAPANESE. TH ARE MEXICAN

I DESCRIBED IT "IN MY OWN WORDS," AND YOU ONLY NEEDED TEN WORDS TO FIGURE IT OUT? I'M GLAD YOU'RE ON **OUR** SIDE!



SO THIS IS HOW YOU TWO BONDED? CONVERSING ON SPACE-CRAFT TRIPS?

AFTER HE TAUGHT YOU HOW TO FLY THE CRAFT, TOO?

PRETTY MUCH. THE TRIP I'VE BEEN TELLING YOU ABOUT IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ONES.

AND IT'S NEAR THE POINT WHERE HE MEETS ME.



I NOTICE YOU MADE A SLIP OF THE TONGUE, RIGHT WHEN YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT DINO DISCORDIANISM AND TELEPATHY IMMUNITY. I GUESS THAT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE TRIP, TOO?



THE WAY IT ENDED, YES. BUT I DIDN'T MAKE THAT CONNECTION THEN.

I WONDER WHAT THE CELESTIAL DINOSAUR VERSION OF ERIS LOOKS LIKE?

I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE KRALTAR DOES?



IS KRALTAR ANYWHERE AROUND HERE? DID HE DIE, TOO?

AND WHY DIDN'T YOU GO TO THE RIFT INSTANTANEOUSLY WITH FTL?

HE'S NOT DEAD. NOT YET, ANYWAY. HE'D HAVE VISITED ME IF HE WERE.

SARANNA, YOUR EYE-PATCH SWITCHED SIDES!



THE GOBLIN MAGIC KEEPING US HERE WEAKENED FOR A SECOND, WHICH MADE REALITY SHIFT FOR A BIT. IT'S HARMLESS. IF GOBLIN MAGIC WERE PERFECT, THEY'D HAVE WON AGAINST THE CHICKEN.

I HOPE THAT IT HOLDS!



TO ANSWER YOUR OTHER QUESTION, THE RIFT'S ENERGIES IMPEDED THE FTL DRIVE, TOO, SO WE HAD TO DO THE EVACUATION TO EARTH THE SLOW WAY. ONCE THEY ALL WERE ON EARTH, THEY COULD HAVE A PROPER EXODUS.

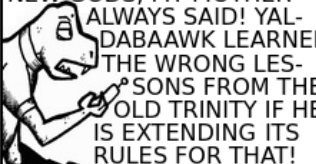


THEY NEEDED SAVING, NOT JUST BECAUSE I'D GOTTEN TO KNOW KRALTAR AND A FEW OTHERS, BUT ALSO BECAUSE THEY KNEW THINGS ABOUT THE CHICKEN AND HIS ALLIES THAT NO ONE ELSE LIVING DID. SOME THINGS WERE MORE USEFUL THAN OTHERS, THOUGH. WHILE IT WAS FUNNY TO KNOW THAT THE CHICKEN'S FRIENDS, IN HIS EQUIVALENT OF HIGH SCHOOL, DREW COMICS OF A CHARACTER THEY MADE UP CALLED INTESTINE-HEAD MAN (BEFORE HE HAD THEM ALL KILLED LATER), IT WASN'T USEFUL UNLESS YOU WERE TRYING TO ENRAGE HIM, AND THE MORE POWERFUL AND UNPREDICTABLE HE GOT, THE WORSE THAT IDEA WAS.



MAX: I DID LEARN SOME HANDY TRICKS SOMETIMES, THOUGH.

THE EKAFUEL LEVELS ARE GOOD... WHAT WAS THAT AGAIN ABOUT RULES AGAINST BLASPHEMY? IF YOUR GODS ARE OFFENDED BY A FEW LITTLE WORDS, IT'S TIME TO GET NEW GODS, MY MOTHER ALWAYS SAID! YAL-DABAAWK LEARNED THE WRONG LESSONS FROM THE OLD TRINITY IF HE IS EXTENDING ITS RULES FOR THAT!



HE WENT ON TO SAY WHAT THE CHICKEN AND THE OLD TRINITY SHOULD DO TO THEMSELVES, REMAINING PERFECTLY CALM AND NEVER ONCE RAISING HIS VOICE. THE AIR STARTED BLUING AROUND HIM AS HE CONTINUED, AND BY THE TIME HE GOT TO WHAT THE FOUR OF THEM SHOULD SPECIFICALLY DO TO THEIR INTERNAL ORGANS WITH A THAGOMIZER, A DURIAN, AND A SAXOPHONE, MY EARS ACTUALLY STARTED BLEEDING AND A STORM STARTED FORMING. AT THAT POINT, HE STOPPED AND SAID, "SEE? I JUST GAVE THEM MIGRAINES!"

SO KRALTAR KNOWS SUPER-BLASPHEMY THAT ACTUALLY HURTS GODS? HOW DID HE LEARN IT?

AND DOES HE KNOW ANY OTHER WAYS TO HURT GODS?

HIS PEOPLE HAVE HAD TO FIGHT GODS BEFORE, SOME OF WHICH CAME FROM HIS PEOPLE.

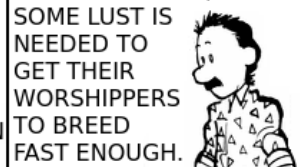
AND THEY'VE WON, TOO.



DID ANY OF THE GODS HAVE RULES AGAINST LUST? ONE TIME WHEN I ATE CHINESE FOOD AND READ A FORTUNE FROM A FORTUNE COOKIE, THE CHICKEN GOD WENT OFF EARLY ABOUT COMMANDMENT 1354, "THOU SHALT NOT ADD 'IN BED' TO THE ENDS OF FORTUNES FROM FORTUNE COOKIES TO TURN THEM INTO INNUENDOS." THAT LED TO HER FIRST EXPLOSION ABOUT "MAKING YOLKS."



ACTUALLY, YES. KRALTAR THOUGHT THEY DIDN'T MAKE SENSE PAST A CERTAIN POINT, SINCE GODS NEED WORSHIPPERS, THEY USUALLY GET MORE WORSHIPPERS BY BREEDING NEW ONES, AND... SOME LUST IS NEEDED TO GET THEIR WORSHIPPERS TO BREED FAST ENOUGH.



WHAT'S AN ORGY, THEN? MY COUSIN SAID IT'S ONE UNLESS YOU'RE BREEDING IN ONE POSITION SHE WOULDN'T DESCRIBE, WITH THE LIGHTS OUT FOR COMMANDMENT 11, AND NOT TAKING JOY IN IT FOR ITS OWN SAKE.



UH... IT'S BREEDING WHILE TAKING JOY IN IT. THE CHICKEN HATES JOY, AS YOU KNOW, UNLESS IT'S JOY IN HIM ALONE.

YEAH, WHAT IS IT?

YIKES! AND HUH.



MAX MUTTERED SOMETHING UNDER HIS BREATH THAT SARANNA DIDN'T HEAR, BUT I DID: "PRAISE EBVOOT FOR NOT MAKING ME TRY TO EXPLAIN ORGIES IN KID-FRIENDLY DETAIL!" I FOUND OUT LATER THAT EBVOOT WAS A GOD OF SMALL FAVORS THAT MAX HAD WORKED WITH FOR YEARS, AND INTRODUCED KRALTAR TO.

SO BRINGING ENOUGH JOY TO PEOPLE SHOULD HURT THE LUMBERCHICKEN TOO! HOW MUCH WOULD WE NEED?



THERE'S NOT ENOUGH POTENTIAL JOY, OR BLASPHEMY FOR THAT MATTER, TO DEFEAT HIM ENTIRELY ON THEIR OWN. THE PROPHECY SPEAKS OF SEVERAL PEOPLE GOING TO WAR AGAINST HIM, WHILE MASS JOY AND BLASPHEMY BY OTHERS FINISH HIM OFF FOR GOOD.



DOES BREAKING THE FOOD COMMANDMENTS HURT HIM TOO, SINCE THERE ARE SO MANY OF THEM?



I KNOW WHAT A THAGOMIZER IS, BUT WHAT'S A DURIAN?



THEY DON'T SEEM TO, SO THEY'RE LIKELY A POWER TRIP ON HIS PART. AND MADE UP ON THE FLY, SINCE THEY'RE SO BADLY ORGANIZED. DID YOU KNOW THERE ARE SEPARATE SECTIONS FOR HOT DOGS, CHILI DOGS, AND CORN DOGS? AND HE HAS A COMPLETE BAN ON DOPIAZA CURRY SAUCE, FOR SOME INEXPLICABLE REASON, IN COMMANDMENT 26956.



I WISH THOSE RULES DID HURT HIM, SO I COULD HAVE PUT COTTAGE CHEESE ON A CHILI DOG, OR GOCHUJANG ON A CORN DOG, OR DOPIAZA CURRY SAUCE ON A VEG-ETABLE LASAGNA. BUT, ANYWAY... OF COURSE YOU'D KNOW WHAT A THAGOMIZER IS, CALVIN, BECAUSE IT'S DINOSAUR-RELATED! BUT A DURIAN IS A FRUIT THAT LOOKS LIKE A SPIKY YELLOW COCONUT.



IT APPARENTLY STINKS, TOO, BUT I'VE ONLY EVER HAD DURIAN CANDY.

WHICH TASTES LIKE CARAMEL MIXED WITH RAW ONION! MAX LIKES IT. I SPIT IT OUT WHEN I TRIED IT. YUK!



I SUPPOSE THERE ISN'T ENOUGH TIME TO TEST EVERY OTHER TYPE OF COMMANDMENT TO FIGURE OUT ALL THE ONES THAT HURT HIM? I MEAN, COMMANDMENT 89898, "THOU SHALT NOT NAME THINGS BASED SOLELY ON HOW COOL THOSE NAMES SOUND," IS ONE I'VE BROKEN SOMETIMES IN PRIVATE.



THAT ONE DOESN'T HURT HIM EITHER, UNFORTUNATELY. I'VE WATCHED YOU FROM HERE SOMETIMES, AND THINGS LIKE CALLING THE BIG BANG "THE HORRENDOUS SPACE KABLOOIE," OR CALLING A PERIWINKLE A "SORCERER'S VIOLET," DON'T DO ANYTHING TO HIM AT ALL THAT I CAN TELL.



MAX: BUT LET ME GET BACK TO THE TRIP WITH KRALTAR. WE WERE ALMOST AT THE RIFT BY THAT POINT.

ARE YOU NOT WORRIED ABOUT WHETHER YOUR BROTHER IS TELLING YOU THE TRUTH?

HE SAYS CALVIN TAKES MORE AFTER ME, WHICH IS TRUE.



I'VE HAPPENED TO LIVE IN THE SWEET SPOT BETWEEN DEMIURGE REGIMES, WHERE I'M OLD ENOUGH TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY, BUT NOT TOO OLD TO CHANGE MY WAYS. AS LONG AS HE THINKS HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO CONVERT ME, HE WON'T TURN ON ME. BESIDES, WE ARE BROTHERS, WHICH SHOULD STILL MEAN SOMETHING.



BUT PART OF YOU STILL WORRIES THAT YOUR BROTHER WILL CHOOSE THE CHICKEN OVER YOU, AND TURN ON YOUR NEPHEW AS AN EXTENSION OF YOU, YES? I'M NO TELEPATH, BUT THIS IS A SITUATION WHERE IT COULD BE NECESSARY TO HAVE ONE AVAILABLE.



THAT'S TRUE. AND HOW DO YOUR PEOPLE HANDLE THINGS WITH TELEPATHY AVAILABLE? THE ETHICS INVOLVED SEEM SKETCHY TO ME. I CAN UNDERSTAND USING IT TO HELP STAY ALIVE, BUT...



IT IS UNCOMMON. WE STARTED USING IT MORE AFTER BEING BACK-STABBED ONE TOO MANY TIMES, WHEN A TELEPATH WAS AROUND BY SHEER COINCIDENCE AND SAVED US. THE MAGUS IS OUR STRONGEST LIVING TELEPATH, BUT EVEN AFTER HIS FAILURE TO CONVINCE YOUR KIND TO TURN AWAY FROM CHICKEN-LIKE THOUGHT, WE KEPT TRYING.



A POLITICALLY POWERFUL HUMAN WHOSE NAME I FORGET MADE A DEAL TO HEAR A GROUP OF US OUT. WE WERE DISGUISED AS HUMANS, AS THE MAGUS HAD BEEN. BUT IT TURNED OUT TO BE AN AMBUSH. TELEPATHY WAS HOW WE DISCOVERED THE PLOT IN TIME TO ESCAPE.



WE COMPLAINED THAT HE BROKE HIS END OF THE DEAL, AND HE SAID, "YOU CAN'T MAKE ME DO ANYTHING I DON'T WANT TO DO," AND SICKED HIS PEOPLE ON US. THE TELEPATH FOUND HE DID NOT WANT TO DIE WHERE HE STOOD, BUT WE MADE HIM DO THAT AFTER WE DROPPED OUR DISGUISES AND PUT HIM IN SHOCK.

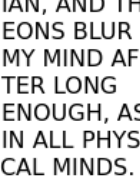


AND WE DID THE SAME TO THE REST OF THEM, SINCE IT WAS EITHER THEM OR US, AS THE TELEPATH ALSO FOUND. AFTER THIS, HAVING TELEPATHS AVAILABLE BECAME STANDARD PROCEDURE.

I UNDERSTAND. YOU WERE THERE.



NO. WHEN I SAID "WE," I MEANT MY SPECIES. IF I HAD BEEN THERE, I WOULD LIKELY REMEMBER THE BETRAYER'S NAME. I KNOW HISTORY, BUT I AM NOT A HISTORIAN, AND THE EONS BLUR IN MY MIND AFTER LONG ENOUGH, AS IN ALL PHYSICAL MINDS.



HOW DO YOU KNOW TELEPATHS ARE TELLING THE TRUTH, THOUGH, IF YOU'RE NOT ONE?



INTENTS PRODUCE COLORED AURAS AROUND THEM, AND THESE ARE UNFALSIFIABLE.



THAT EXPLAINS WHY I OCCASIONALLY SEE ONE OF YOUR PEOPLE FLASH A CERTAIN COLOR! I THOUGHT I WAS SEEING THINGS!



EXACTLY. IF ONLY YOU COULD SEE ULTRAVIOLET AS WE CAN!



IT'S ALSO THE ONLY RELIABLE WAY TO FIND YALDABAAWK SUPPORTERS. THE CHICK-WHISTLES THEY CLAIM ARE SO WIDESPREAD AS TO BE USELESS. AND WHILE TELEPATHS CANNOT DIRECTLY DETECT BRAINWASHING, THEY CAN DETECT INTENT TO SERVE THE CHICKEN.



CALVIN: WAIT, CHICK-WHISTLES? MAX: SYMBOLS, NUMBERS, AND OTHER THINGS THE CHICKEN CLAIMS AS SIGNS OF SUPPORT. CALVIN: HOW DO NUMBERS WORK THAT WAY? MAX: THEY DON'T. HE MAKES THEM UP. CALVIN: LIKE HOW? MAX: SUPPOSEDLY, ONE IS HIS BECAUSE HE'S THE ONE TRUE GOD, TWO IS HIS BECAUSE HIS AXE CUTS THINGS IN TWO, THREE IS HIS BECAUSE HE BENT THE THREE OF THE OLD TRINITY TO HIS WILL, ETC. CALVIN: WHAT ABOUT SIX, WHICH HE DOESN'T LIKE? MAX: AN UPSIDE-DOWN NINE, STANDING FOR THE LETTERS IN "HOLY CHICK," HIM AS A KID. WHEN IT SUITS HIS PURPOSES.

GOOD. BUT IT'S NOT JUST MY BROTHER. HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE ANOMALOUS CASES OF ARJENFLORB SYNDROME? ONES THAT OCCUR FAR AWAY, IN SEEMINGLY RANDOM PLACES?



YES. THERE ARE RUMORS THAT IT MIGHT ACTUALLY BE DIVINE PUNISHMENT FOR HERESY, WHICH STARTED WITH THE ORCS SINCE THEY'RE UNENSLAVEABLE. AND MOVED TO SIMILAR HUMANS.



WHICH ARE JUST THAT, RUMORS.



RUMORS WHICH, IF THEY GET FROM THE LOWER DOCTORS TO THE FOUR HEALERS AT THE TOP, MAY WELL GIVE THEM AN EXCUSE TO STOP ALL TREATMENT OF IT. THE FOUR ARE, RARELY, MERCIFUL, WHICH IS WHY EVERYONE KEEPS TRYING WITH THEM, BUT THE KEY WORD IS "RARELY."



IS THIS NOT LIKE HOW IT WAS IN THE LAST FEW YEARS OF JESUS AND THE OTHERS, WHERE THEIR FOLLOWERS, INSTEAD OF NOT TAKING JOBS THEY WOULD DISAPPROVE OF, TOOK THE JOBS ANYWAY, REFUSED TO DO THEM DUE TO THEIR "SINCERELY HELD RELIGIOUS BELIEFS" AND EXPECTED TO BE PAID REGARDLESS?



WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

WITHOUT TELEPATHY, SINCERE BELIEF IS UNPROVABLE, SO IT MAY AS WELL BE EXCUSE.

AH. I GUESS IT IS!



THE OLD TRINITY SHOULD HAVE BEEN OFFENDED BY ITS FOLLOWERS USING IT TO GET OUT OF DOING WORK, BUT IT WAS GOING CRAZY IN THE CHICKEN WAY EVEN THEN. EVEN SO, IT'S NOT FAIR TO JUDGE THE WHOLE CONCEPT BY HOW SOME PEOPLE WEAPONIZE IT. I COULD SAY THE SAME ABOUT CONSENT, AFTER ALL.



MY APOLOGIES. IT IS EXHAUSTING TO KEEP FIGHTING THIS WAR, AND ALTHOUGH NEITHER OF OUR SPECIES ARE PERFECT, IT IS DIFFICULT TO FULLY UNDERSTAND YOUR SPECIES' VERSIONS OF SOME THINGS. I ASSUME THERE WAS FAVORITISM IN HOW THAT VERSION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM WAS ENFORCED, HOWEVER?



APOLOGY ACCEPTED. JUST BECAUSE I'M IN THIS SPECIES DOESN'T MEAN I UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING IT DOES, EITHER. AND, YES, THERE WAS DEFINITE FAVORITISM. A WORSHIPPER OF RAZZENFRATTEN, GOD OF PROFANITY, COULDN'T GET ACCOMMODATION TO SWEAR CREATIVELY FIVE TIMES A DAY, EVEN WHEN HE WOULDN'T DO IT IN FRONT OF CUSTOMERS OR COWORKERS.



AND THE RENEGADE BRANCH OF CHRISTIANS, WHO FOCUSED MORE ON COMPASSION FOR ALL AND IGNORED THE BITS WHERE, TO QUOTE WIZARD SUNFLARE, "YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO LET JESUS SCOOP YOUR BRAIN OUT AND PUPPET YOU AROUND," WERE NOT ACCOMMODATED EITHER? THE CHICKEN HAS NO PITY FOR THEM NOW.



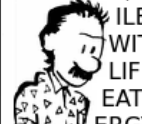
I'M PRETTY SURE THEY'RE EXTINCT NOW, AND THE CHICKEN ONLY USES THEM AS A SCAPEGOAT WHEN HE HAS BAD DAYS. THEY WERE THE FIRST TARGETS OF THE ANTI-HERESY SQUADS, REMEMBER. SIMILAR TO WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR... WHAT WERE THEY? ALBIGENSIANS?



THEY WERE NOT OURS, BUT THEY WERE INFLUENCED BY THE MAGUS' IDEAS. SOME OF MY PEOPLE THOUGHT THEM HERETICS, BUT THEY WERE CLOSE ENOUGH TO BE SAVED FROM CHICKEN-STYLE THOUGHT WITH A FEW PUSHES IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. UNTIL THEY WERE MASSACRED.



ALONG WITH THEIR NEIGHBORS, WHOSE ONLY CRIME WAS LIVING IN THE WRONG PLACE. "KILL THEM ALL AND LET GOD SORT THEM OUT," INDEED. AND THEN YOU ALL GAVE UP TRYING TO SAVE US, WENT TO WAR WITH THE CELESTIAL BIRDS YOURSELF, LOST, GOT EXILED TO A PLANET WITH NO SAPIENT LIFE, AND HAD TO EAT ITS LIFE ENERGY TO SURVIVE.



I WAS NOT AWARE THAT YOUR KIND OBJECTED TO HERESY THAT MUCH. AND WIZARD SUNFLARE WAS A PHILOSOPHER?



ANOTHER UNCOMMON QUALITY IN THEM. AND SHE DABBLED IN IT, IN NOW-BURNED TEXTS.



SHE ALSO DISTINGUISHED BETWEEN CONSENT AS A WAY TO JUSTIFY AMORAL SELFISHNESS AND CONSENT WITH FAIRNESS INCLUDED, CALLING THE LATTER "INFORMED CONSENT." IT'S A SHAME THAT WISDOM IS SO OFTEN CONSIGNED TO THE REALM OF GHOSTS.



RIGHT, THE ANIMISM THING YOU TOLD ME ABOUT. ALTHOUGH HOW DO YOU AVOID BEING HAUNTED BY AN ENTIRE PLANET'S WORTH OF LIFE FORCE? DO MEAT EATERS GET HAUNTED BY THE ANIMALS THEY EAT, TOO? SOME OF THE CELESTIAL AND DEMONIC SPECIES I'VE SEEN ARE OBLIGATE CARNIVORES WHO CAN'T EAT ANYTHING ELSE!



THINGS DONE FOR SURVIVAL'S SAKE THAT MINIMIZE HARM GENERALLY DO NOT RESULT IN HAUNTINGS. AS FOR THE CASE THAT EVERYONE BRINGS UP, ABOUT THE VEGAN HAUNTED BY THE SPIRITS OF VENGEFUL TOMATOES UNTIL SHE WENT MAD, I DON'T KNOW. THAT CASE HAS CERTAIN... MISSING DETAILS. TOMATOES ARE USUALLY MELLOW, FROM WHAT I HEAR.



TO GET BACK TO MY BROTHER'S LETTER, HE SAYS THAT CALVIN'S BEEN **ACCEPTABLE**, WHICH IS A TERM HE USES FOR "GOOD, BUT NOT GOOD ENOUGH."



AND ONLY BY HIS STANDARDS, YES?



I ASKED HIM IN MY LAST LETTER IF I COULD VISIT AGAIN, AND HE SAID, "YOU'RE MY BROTHER AND I LOVE YOU, BUT YOUR LACK OF OPEN PIETY IS A PROBLEM. I SUSPECT IT'S EITHER ANTI-CHICKEN BIAS OR HERESY. IF YOU CAN PROVE OTHERWISE, THEN YES. IF NOT, I WILL NOT HAVE YOU PUTTING IDEAS IN MY SON'S HEAD, SO NO."



THAT **IS** WORRYING. YAL-DABA-AWK'S TREATING BIAS AND HERESY DIFFERENTLY IS ALSO SURPRISING. HE TREATED THEM IDENTICALLY WHEN HE FIRST ATTAINED GODHOOD.



KNOW.



IT WAS PROBABLY TO GIVE HIMSELF AN EXCUSE TO MAKE MORE COMMANDMENTS. BREAKING THE ONE ABOUT CHANGING THE LYRICS TO CHICKMAS CAROLS FOR FUN IS BIAS, BUT NOT HERESY. I FORGET ITS NUMBER, BUT YOU KNOW THE ONE.

I FORGET IT, TOO, BUT YES.



CALVIN: WOW! LIKE WHAT?
MAX: ONE THAT I HEARD WHEN I WAS A KID. BACK WHEN IT WAS STILL A CHRISTMAS CAROL, WAS "♪ JOY TO THE WORLD, THE SCHOOL BURNED DOWN, AND ALL THE TEACHERS DIED! EXCEPT FOR THE PRINCIPAL, WHO'S SITTING ON THE TOILET BOWL, THEN SOMEBODY FLUSHED HER DOWN, THEN SOMEBODY FLUSHED HER DOWN, THEN SO-O-O-O-OMEBODY FLUSHED HER DOWN! ♪"
CALVIN: HA HA! WITH SOME TEACHERS I'VE HAD, THAT FITS!
SARANNA: SING "ROCK ME AMITAYUS" FOR US, CALVIN!

ONE SHORT MUSICAL INTERLUDE...

♪ EVERYONE HAS BEEN YOUR MOTHER! BEEN YOUR MOTHER, BEEN YOUR MOTHER, BEEN YOUR MOTHER! ♪



AMITABHA, OR AMITAYUS, DEFINITELY HAS A SENSE OF HUMOR!



...AND THEN BACK TO BUSINESS.

WHEN YOU FIRST SANG IT, IT'S A GOOD THING NOBODY WALKED IN AND ONLY HEARD THE "YOUR MOTHER" PART, OR YOU'D LIKELY END UP IN TROUBLE!

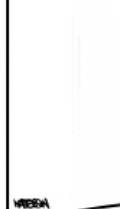
THAT ALMOST HAPPENED! I HAD TO PRETEND IT WAS ABOUT MOM!



HA HA!



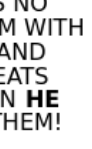
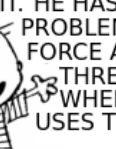
IT'S COOL HEARING ABOUT HOW YOU WENT ON AN EXTENDED ADVENTURE THAT GOT YOU A CELESTIAL DINOSAUR FRIEND FROM ANOTHER DIMENSION, AND HOW HE AND HIS KIND ARE AT WAR WITH THE CHICKEN TOO, BUT DID ALL OF YOUR TALKS WITH HIM LAST SO LONG? HOW'D YOUR TRIP END UP?



I'M JUST ABOUT AT THE END OF THE TRIP. THE CONVERSATION WAS ONLY A FEW MINUTES LONG, BUT IT SEEMS LONGER IN THE TELLING. I'VE RAMBLED, BUT... MY BROTHER'S LETTERS SUGGESTED THAT HE WAS KEEPING YOU IN A TINY LITTLE BOX, SO TO SPEAK, AND NOT TEACHING YOU MUCH OTHER THAN OBEDIENCE. EVEN IF YOU FOUGHT IT.



HE KEEPS SAYING, "I HATE FORCE AND THREATS. I'LL DO SOMETHING ONLY IF I **CHOOSE** TO DO IT." I FIGURED OUT THAT WAS A BAD IDEA AFTER HE CHOSE TO SEND ME TO THE DUNGEON, BUT IT'S GOOD TO KNOW I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO GETS IT. HE HAS NO PROBLEM WITH FORCE AND THREATS WHEN **HE** USES THEM!



MAX: TYPICAL. BUT LET ME WRAP ALL THIS UP...

IF MY NEPHEW GETS DECLARED BIASED OR A HERETIC, HE'LL GET THE SAME KIND OF TERRIBLE HEALTH CARE MY CLIENT'S MATE IS GETTING, AND WITH ARJEN-FLORB SYNDROME SHOWING UP IN RANDOM PLACES...

THAT'S WHY YOU WORRY. HER FATE COULD EASILY BE YOUR NEPHEW'S FATE, SO YOU ARE HOPING IT SOMEHOW WORKS OUT.



EEEEEEEEEE!

THAT IS THE RIFT PROXIMITY ALARM. WE SHALL ARRIVE IN A FEW MOMENTS.



ONE LAST QUESTION. HOW CAN THE MAGUS BE LOST? CAN'T YOU STILL TALK TO HIS GHOST?



THE CHICKEN HAS DEVELOPED WAYS TO SILENCE GHOSTS WHOM HE DEEMS BAD ENOUGH.



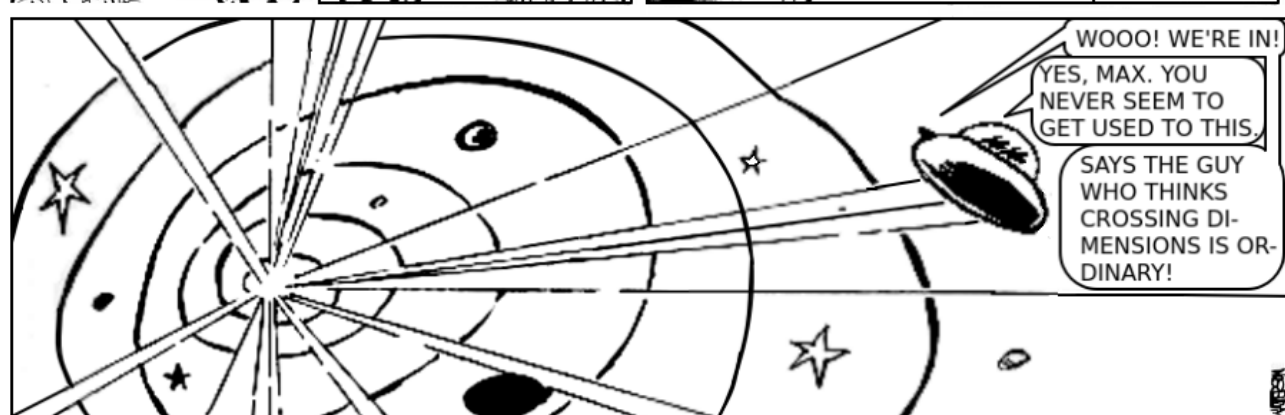
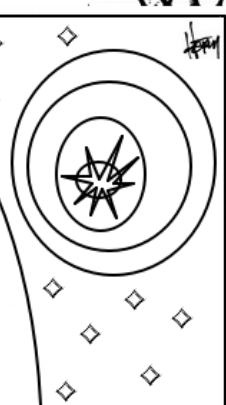
I ALSO HAVE ONE LAST QUESTION. IF THE MAGUS COULDN'T BUY JESUS' POWER OR GET IT FROM HIM FOR FREE, WHAT WOULD HAVE WORKED?



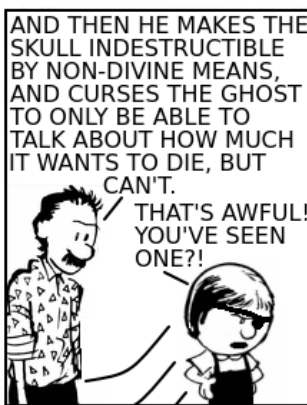
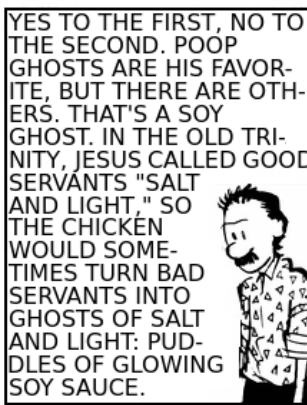
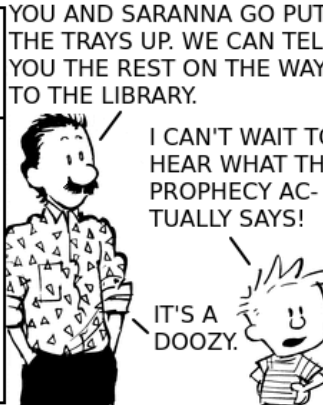
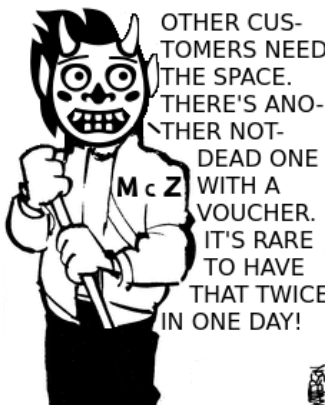
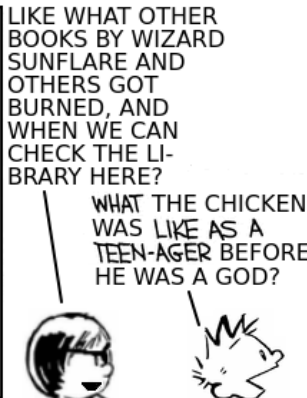
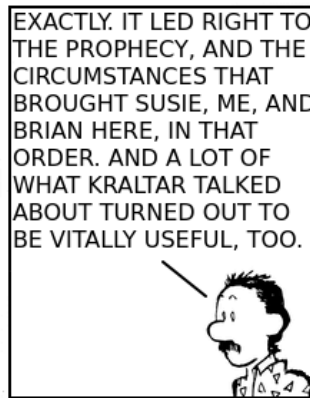
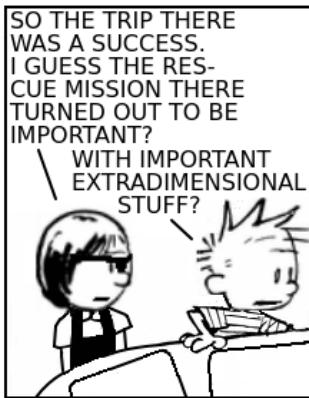
OTHER THAN FORCE, YOU MEAN? I DON'T KNOW.



UNFORTUNATE. BUT THAT IS THE PAST, AND THIS IS THE PRESENT. THE RIFT BECKONS!



WOOO! WE'RE IN!
YES, MAX. YOU NEVER SEEM TO GET USED TO THIS.
SAYS THE GUY WHO THINKS CROSSING DIMENSIONS IS ORDINARY!



I DON'T THINK I WANT TO KNOW, MYSELF. THE WORST CASE OF THE CHICKEN'S RAGE THAT I KNOW OF WAS WHEN HE TURNED... WHAT WAS THE NAME? NED SOMETHING? INTO A SOY GHOST



FOR SAYING "HAPPY HOLIDAYS" INSTEAD OF "MERRY CHICKMAS."



RIGHT, THAT GUY!

HE DID IT ON IMPULSE. THEN HE WANTED TO INTERROGATE NED TO SEE IF HE KNEW ANYONE ELSE WHO WAS DOING THAT.

BUT HE PUT SO MUCH POWER INTO TRANSFORMING NED THAT HE COULDN'T UNDO IT, AND NED'S MIND WAS TOO ALIEN IN THAT FORM FOR TELEPATHY TO WORK.



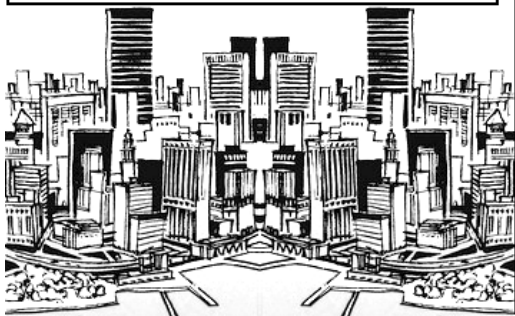
SO HE HAD TO LEARN A TINY BIT OF SELF-CONTROL! GOOD!

SUCH BEHAVIOR RIVALS THAT OF OUR GODDESS OF INCOMPETENT REVENGE, A LESSER WIFE IN THE GOD OF INCOMPETENT DESIGN'S HAREM. AS MY PEOPLE WOULD SAY ABOUT HER, "3794555068539420623-1704928654925919276-3066032539477634748-3403255243718354423-2064856421357932225-1944293854186232595-3391167070286837946-3088101896353620482-2469500200454068310." IN SHORT, HER ACTIONS ARE BEYOND FOOLISHNESS.

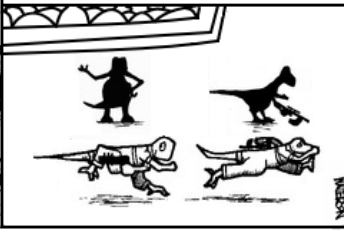


INDEED. PROPER REVENGE IS HARD.

MAX: AFTER WE LANDED, WE WAITED ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY FOR THE REFUGEES. I'D SEEN ENOUGH CEL-DINOS TO KNOW WHAT THEY LOOKED LIKE IN GENERAL, BUT KRALTAR SAID THE MAGUS WAS OF A DIFFERENT BREED.



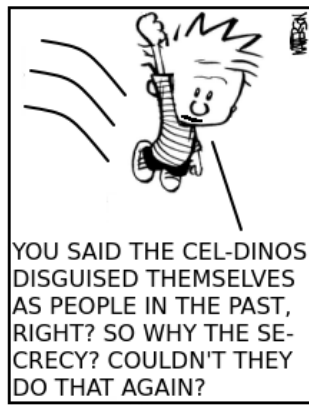
OUR CRAFT COULD ONLY HOLD A MAXIMUM OF FOUR PASSENGERS, SO TWO BESIDES KRALTAR AND ME. THERE WERE A LOT MORE REFUGEES THAN THAT IN THE CURRENT BATCH THAT CROWDED BEFORE US. BUT THERE WERE JUST ENOUGH OTHER CRAFTS TO TAKE THEM.



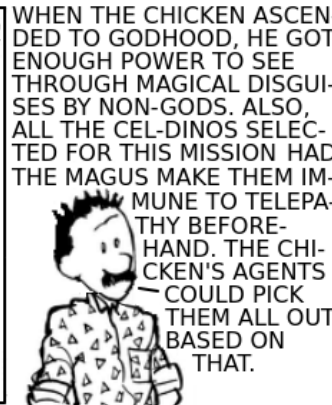
AND THEN A FEATHERY BLUR DARTED INTO MY FIELD OF VISION. THAT WAS SIMON MAGUSSAURUS, ARRIVING IN STYLE.



BUT FOR THIS MISSION, WE NEEDED SECRECY.



YOU SAID THE CEL-DINOS DISGUISED THEMSELVES AS PEOPLE IN THE PAST, RIGHT? SO WHY THE SECRECY? COULDN'T THEY DO THAT AGAIN?



WHEN THE CHICKEN ASCENDED TO GODHOOD, HE GOT ENOUGH POWER TO SEE THROUGH MAGICAL DISGUISES BY NON-GODS. ALSO, ALL THE CEL-DINOS SELECTED FOR THIS MISSION HAD THE MAGUS MAKE THEM IMMUNE TO TELEPATHY BEFOREHAND. THE CHICKEN'S AGENTS COULD PICK THEM ALL OUT BASED ON THAT.



THAT STUFF ABOUT FALSE FORMS, RIGHT? GIVEN WHAT I HAD TO GO THROUGH WITH MY COUSIN, I CAN CERTAINLY BELIEVE THIS WORLD IS BAD GUY HEAVEN AND WE'RE THE ONES THE BAD GUYS KEEP AROUND AS TOYS THEY CAN KEEP FIXING AND BREAKING UNTIL WE FIND A WAY OUT OF THEIR TOY-BOX FOR GOOD! IF I UNDERSTAND IT CORRECTLY?

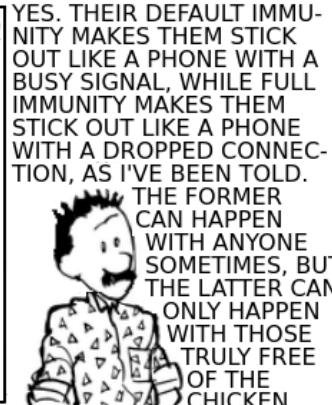


YES, THAT'S A GOOD SUMMARY. ALTHOUGH IT'S A SHAME YOU HAD TO GROW UP LIKE THAT.

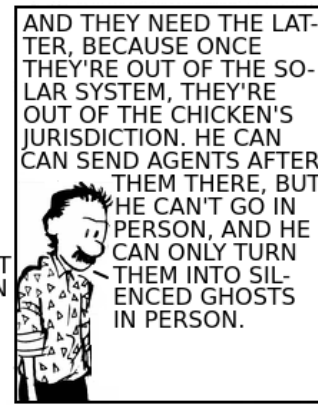
OUR PARENTS DIDN'T DO MUCH BETTER, JUST SO YOU KNOW.



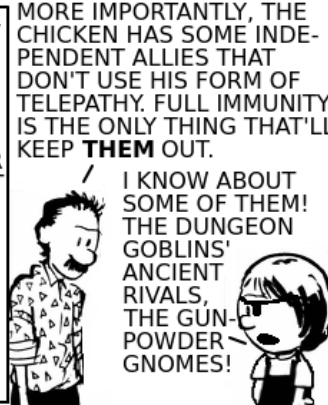
I DON'T GET IT. YOU SAID THEY'RE IMMUNE TO CHICKEN-STYLE TELEPATHY BY DEFAULT. DOESN'T THAT MAKE THEM STICK OUT ALREADY? AND, IF SO, WHY GO TO MORE TROUBLE JUST TO STICK OUT MORE?



YES. THEIR DEFAULT IMMUNITY MAKES THEM STICK OUT LIKE A PHONE WITH A BUSY SIGNAL, WHILE FULL IMMUNITY MAKES THEM STICK OUT LIKE A PHONE WITH A DROPPED CONNECTION, AS I'VE BEEN TOLD. THE FORMER CAN HAPPEN WITH ANYONE SOMETIMES, BUT THE LATTER CAN ONLY HAPPEN WITH THOSE TRULY FREE OF THE CHICKEN.

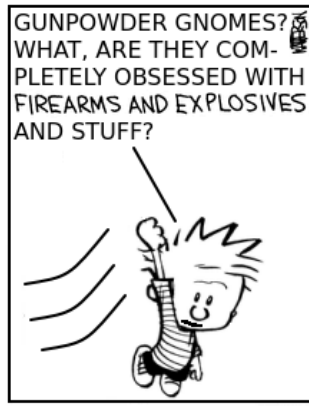


AND THEY NEED THE LATTER, BECAUSE ONCE THEY'RE OUT OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM, THEY'RE OUT OF THE CHICKEN'S JURISDICTION. HE CAN SEND AGENTS AFTER THEM THERE, BUT HE CAN'T GO IN PERSON, AND HE CAN ONLY TURN THEM INTO SILENCED GHOSTS IN PERSON.

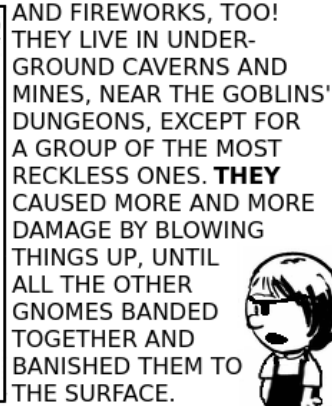


MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE CHICKEN HAS SOME INDEPENDENT ALLIES THAT DON'T USE HIS FORM OF TELEPATHY. FULL IMMUNITY IS THE ONLY THING THAT'LL KEEP THEM OUT.

I KNOW ABOUT SOME OF THEM! THE DUNGEON GOBLINS' ANCIENT RIVALS, THE GUNPOWDER GNOMES!



GUNPOWDER GNOMES? WHAT, ARE THEY COMPLETELY OBSESSED WITH FIREARMS AND EXPLOSIVES AND STUFF?

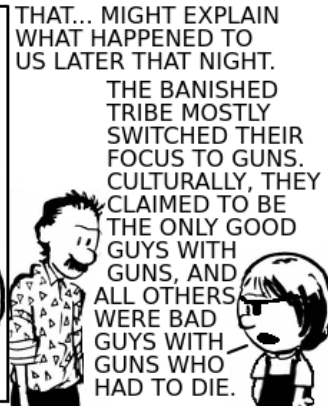


AND FIREWORKS, TOO! THEY LIVE IN UNDERGROUND CAVERNS AND MINES, NEAR THE GOBLINS' DUNGEONS, EXCEPT FOR A GROUP OF THE MOST RECKLESS ONES. THEY CAUSED MORE AND MORE DAMAGE BY BLOWING THINGS UP, UNTIL ALL THE OTHER GNOMES BANDED TOGETHER AND BANISHED THEM TO THE SURFACE.



DID THEY ADAPT TO THE SURFACE BY ONLY COMING OUT AT NIGHT, AND COVERING THEMSELVES WITH TRENCHCOATS AND FEDORAS?


ACTUALLY, YES, AT THE DIRECTION OF THEIR LEADER, HARRY HARRY!




THAT... MIGHT EXPLAIN WHAT HAPPENED TO US LATER THAT NIGHT.

THE BANISHED TRIBE MOSTLY SWITCHED THEIR FOCUS TO GUNS. CULTURALLY, THEY CLAIMED TO BE THE ONLY GOOD GUYS WITH GUNS, AND ALL OTHERS WERE BAD GUYS WITH GUNS WHO HAD TO DIE.


SO THEY'RE RADICAL TERRORISTS WHO WANT TO SHOOT EVERYONE WHO ISN'T THEM? DAD'S COMPLAINED ABOUT TERRORISTS A LOT, BUT NEVER ABOUT GNOME TERRORISTS!




THEY'RE USUALLY SMART ENOUGH TO ONLY GO AFTER "UNDESIRABLES," AND THEY HAVE A TENDENCY TO DECIDE THAT FELLOW GUN GNOMES ARE SUDDENLY BAD GUYS WHEN THEY WANT SOMETHING. THE OLD TRINITY LET THEM GET AWAY WITH A LOT BECAUSE ANY GUN RESTRICTIONS WOULD STOP THEM FROM EVENTUALLY RULING EARTH BY MASS-SHOOTING ALL THE NON-BELIEVERS.



RIGHT. WHEN THE COM-PASSIONATE RENEGADE CHRISTIANS WENT EX-TINCT, BELIEF IN THE RAPSHOOT REPLACED BELIEF IN THE RAPTURE AMONG THE OTHERS. AND THE CHICKEN EXPLOITED THAT WHEN HE TOOK OVER, OFFERING AUTONOMY IN THE LIBERTY TOWNS INSTEAD OF IMMEDIATE EXECUTIONS.




AND THE GUN GNOMES HAD WINNOWNED THEMSELVES DOWN TO A TINY GROUP BY THAT POINT. TO SURVIVE, THEY WILLINGLY SERVE THE CHICKEN NOW AND SHOOT ONLY WHO HE WANTS SHOT. THE GOBLINS WARNED ME ABOUT THEM EARLY ON, AND EVEN THE OTHER GNOMES DESPISE THEM NOW, I'VE HEARD.




WHY DID THE CHICKEN MAKE A DEAL WITH THEM INSTEAD OF JUST ENSLAVING THEM AS HE DID THE GOBLINS?




DUNGEONS FIT HIS PURPOSES MORE THAN CAVERNS OR MINES, AND THE GOBLINS TENDED TO BE STRONGER THAN GNOMES. ALSO, THE GUN GNOMES COULDN'T HURT HIM WITH THEIR GUNS, AND THEY NEEDED PROTECTION FROM ALL THE ENEMIES THEY'D MADE. BEING FORCED TO FOLLOW THE CHICKEN'S RULES ALSO PUT SOME LIMITS ON THEM, BUT I'M NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND ONE OF THE RULES.




THEY CAN'T BE FULLY DISARMED, BECAUSE THEY CAN TRANSFORM CERTAIN BODY PARTS INTO GUNS AND USE THOSE, AND ONE RULE FORBIDS TURNING SPERM INTO BULLETS. UH... IT WOULD BE TOO HARD TO AIM SO MANY AT ONCE!



MY COUSIN ONCE SAID SHOOTING SOMEONE WAS JUST LIKE MAKING YOLKS WITH THEM, SINCE YOU'RE EITHER TAKING OR MAKING LIFE, SO SHOOTING THEM THE WRONG WAY ACTUALLY BREAKS THE MATING RULES. IF YOU SHOOT THEM WITH THOSE BULLETS, YES.



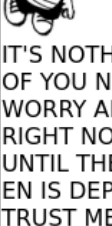
THAT MISSION COULD HAVE GONE A LOT WORSE, THEN, IF THEY'D GROWN MORE GUNS. AND THAT DOES FINALLY EXPLAIN COMMANDMENT 890, ABOUT NOT TURNING SPERM INTO BULLETS, AND COMMANDMENT 889, ABOUT NOT TURNING... SPERM LAUNCHERS INTO GUNS.



BUT WHAT IS SPERM, ANYWAY? I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS, EITHER!



OTHER THAN AS A WORD THAT CAN FREAK DAD OUT, I DON'T KNOW EITHER! IT'S NOTHING ANY OF YOU NEED TO WORRY ABOUT RIGHT NOW. NOT UNTIL THE CHICKEN IS DEPOSED. TRUST ME.



MAX: BUT I'M GETTING AHEAD OF MYSELF AGAIN. THE MAGUS WAS FRIENDLY ENOUGH, BUT I WONDERED WHY HE SEEMED A BIT DISTRACTED. I CAN SEE VETHION AND KHALARI IN THE SKY NOW. IF I CAN SEE MARS AND SATURN IN THE SKY ON EARTH, IT'S TIME.



WHAT TIME IS THAT? AND I'M MAX. KRALTAR SAID HE TOLD YOU ABOUT ME.




YES, HE DID, AND YOU HAVE MY THANKS FOR BEING AN ALLY OF OUR PEOPLE. AS FOR THE TIME, A PROPHECY MAY BE COMING TRUE. ONE THAT MAY WELL END YALDA-BAAWK'S POWER.




BUT AS EXCITING AS THAT IS, THERE'S THE MATTER OF KEEPING IT OUT OF THE WRONG MINDS.




THE MAGUS MEANS IMMUNITY FROM TELEPATHY, AS I SPOKE OF EARLIER. I'VE HAD IT FOR AWHILE. DO YOU TRUST ME WHEN I SAY IT WILL DO YOU NO HARM, AND HELP YOU IN THE LONG TERM? MAX: I DID. MY NEXT QUESTION WAS, "WHAT DO I NEED TO DO?"




SO HE PAUSED THE WHOLE MISSION TO GET RID OF YOUR FALSE FORM? I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THEY WERE UNDER A TIME LIMIT!




I WASN'T THE ONLY ONE. THERE WERE A FEW OTHER HUMANS THERE WHO NEEDED IT, TOO. HE JUST HAPPENED TO TALK TO ME FIRST. HIS VERSION OF THE LIBERATION RITUAL WAS ALSO RATHER QUICK: A FEW MINUTES OF CHANTING AFTER WE TOOK VOWS TO USE OUR NEW STATUS TO HELP OTHER PEOPLE OUT OF THIS SO-CALLED REALITY.

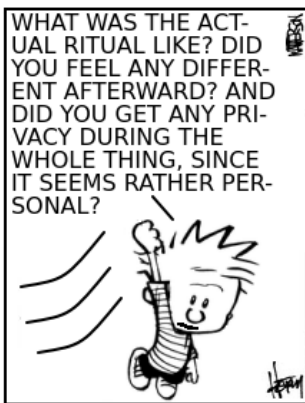


WHY WERE VOWS NECESSARY, SINCE HE COULD READ YOUR MINDS? THE IMPORTANCE OF CONVICTION, AND A WAY FOR US TO MORE EASILY STICK AROUND AS GHOSTS, IF NEED BE.



I VOW TO STAY AROUND LONG ENOUGH TO HELP MY BROTHER AND SISTER-IN-LAW IF THEY CAN BE HELPED, AND TO HELP MY NEPHEW REGARDLESS. AND IF THE CHICKEN BANS PHILLY CHEESESTEAKS IN ANY FORM, I VOW TO COME BACK AROUND ON PRINCIPLE. FOR THIS, I AT-TAIN GNOSIS. MAX: BREAKING ONE ARBITRARY RULE IN YOUR VOWS WAS APPARENTLY A TRADITION, AS WELL.





WHAT WAS THE ACTUAL RITUAL LIKE? DID YOU FEEL ANY DIFFERENT AFTERWARD? AND DID YOU GET ANY PRIVACY DURING THE WHOLE THING, SINCE IT SEEMS RATHER PERSONAL?

I SUPPOSE, ALTHOUGH IT DIDN'T MAKE ME SEE DIFFERENTLY IN **THAT** SENSE.

ALL THE TALK ABOUT ALIEN MINDS' BEING IMMUNE TO TELEPATHY... IT'S GOOD TO KNOW, BUT WHAT ABOUT FEY LIKE THE GOBLINS?



THERE WERE IMPROMPTU PRIVACY BOOTHS SET UP, YES. THEY WERE NORMALLY USED FOR BATTLEFIELD RITUALS, BUT, GIVEN THE MISSION'S RISKS, THE DINOS FIGURED THEY WERE NECESSARY. AND THEY WERE RIGHT, AS IT TURNED OUT.



YEAH! YOU SAID THE CHICKEN COULDN'T READ THEM, AND I NEVER FIGURED OUT WHAT THEY EAT, SINCE THEY DON'T EAT WITH THE INMATES!



MAX: THE RITUAL ITSELF WAS A BLUR. AND THEN...



WHOA. I... DON'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK NOW!

DON'T WORRY. YOU'LL SOON ADJUST!

YOU'RE PROBABLY THINKING SOMETHING SCARY, LIKE THE BLOOD OF THE INNOCENT, BUT NO. THEY CAN EAT THE SAME FOOD AS MORTALS. BOTH THE GOBLINS AND THE GNOMES COME FROM THE ALTERWORLD, A WARPED REFLECTION OF **THIS** WORLD THAT'S STILL SIMILAR ENOUGH TO OURS THAT THEY WERE ABLE TO ADAPT WITHOUT MUCH TROUBLE.



IT WAS BEING BROKEN, BEING PUT BACK TOGETHER A NEW WAY, AND REALIZING THAT THE OLD WAY I WAS PUT TOGETHER WAS ALL WRONG, DESPITE FEELING RIGHT.



KRALTAR ONLY KNEW THEY'RE IMMUNE TO CHICKEN-STYLE TELEPATHY. THE CEL-DINOS HADN'T DEALT MUCH WITH THEM, BUT THE PROPHECY THE MAGUS MENTIONED TURNED OUT TO INVOLVE THEM.

I'M NOT OLD ENOUGH YET TO KNOW WHAT DROVE THEM TO THIS WORLD.



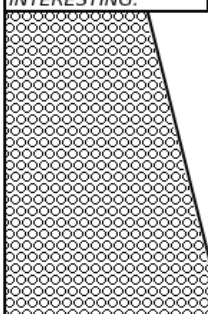
I WONDER HOW THE GOBLINS ENDED UP ENSLAVED. DON'T THEY HAVE OTHER-WORLDLY DEFENSES, OR SECRET NINJA SQUADS, OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

SARANNA: I'M NOT OLD ENOUGH TO KNOW ALL THE DETAILS OF THAT, EITHER. BUT THEY DON'T HAVE NINJA SQUADS, THEY HAVE WRESTLING SQUADS, PER ANCIENT TRADITION. ALTHOUGH AFTER THEY CAME TO THIS WORLD, THEY LEARNED ABOUT OTHER FORMS OF WRESTLING, AND ADOPTED SOME CUSTOMS FROM THEM.



WHAT IS THIS?

DUNGEON GOBLINS' MAGICAL LUCHADOR MATCHES CAN BE... INTERESTING.



I MAGICALLY BUILD A WALL OF TEXT! MY STORY IS TOLD! NO! THE JOURNEY IS IN THE DETAILS! I MAGICALLY ATTACK!



I BREAK YOUR WALL! YOUR STORY IS NOW, "BAD GUYS CONQUER THE WORLD; GOOD GUYS FREE IT; THE END!"



MAX: SO MY HEAD SPUN FOR A FEW MINUTES, BUT AFTER I AND ALL THE OTHER NEWLY LIBERATED HUMANS RECOVERED, WE GOT ALL THE REFUGEES INTO THE SPACECRAFTS, LIFTED OFF, AND CROSSED DIMENSIONS AGAIN. LITTLE DID ANY OF US KNOW WHAT AWAITED BACK ON EARTH.



KRALTAR HAD TOLD THE OTHERS ABOUT YALDABAABW'S WEAKNESS TO BLASPHEMY, AND HOW HE'D EXPLOITED IT JUST BEFORE THE MISSION. ALL THE OTHER CEL-DINOS WERE INCREDULOUS, THE MAGUS MOST OF ALL. ONE OF THE OTHERS, THALVI, SAID THAT PUTTING THE ENEMY AT LEAST PARTIALLY OUT OF COMMISSION WOULD ONLY HELP US. WE WERE STILL ALL ARMED, JUST IN CASE, ALTHOUGH THE CEL-DINOS' GUNS FIRED LASERS AND NOT BULLETS. AFTER LANDING FAR ENOUGH AWAY FROM THE RIFT, WE SPURTED TOWARD THE SPACECRAFT HANGAR IN THE NEARBY WOODS. BUT THEY TURNED OUT TO NOT BE EMPTY.



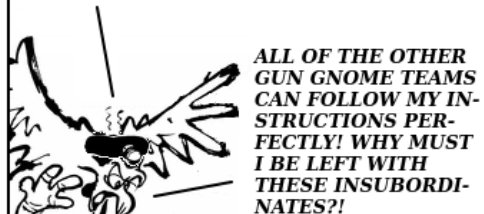
WE'D OCCASIONALLY SEEN A FEW OF THESE SHORT PEOPLE (OR GUN GNOMES, AS SARANNA POINTED OUT) HUNTING FOR FOOD IN THE WOODS, BUT THE ONES HERE TO-NIGHT WERE HUNTING **US**.



ELSEWHERE...
EEEEHHH! SOMEONE TURN THE LIGHTS DOWN! IT'S BAD ENOUGH THAT ONLY BREZZIK'S TEAM COULD RESPOND IN TIME!

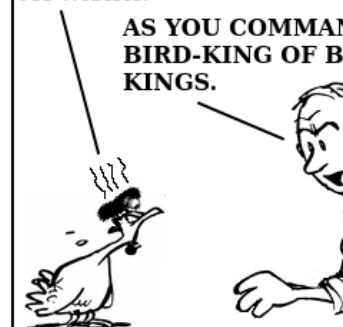


IF HE GIVES ME THAT SPIEL AGAIN ABOUT HOW HIS INSTRUCTIONS ARE TOO COMPLICATED, AND HOW I'M CONDESCENDING IF I GIVE HIM SIMPLIFIED INSTRUCTIONS, I SWEAR I'LL TURN ALL HIS LIMBS INTO BALLOON ANIMALS!



ALL OF THE OTHER GUN GNOME TEAMS CAN FOLLOW MY INSTRUCTIONS PERFECTLY! WHY MUST I BE LEFT WITH THESE INSUBORDINATES?!

YOU! GOOD SERVANT! TURN THE LIGHTS DOWN, OR FACE MY WRATH!



AS YOU COMMAND, BIRD-KING OF BIRD-KINGS.

IT'S NOT FAIR THAT ONLY I SUFFER! MY BELOVED BUTT-VICEROY, SINCE YOU'RE ALSO VULNERABLE TO BLASPHEMY, YOU CAN SHARE IN MY MIGRAINE, AS A GOOD UNDERLING SHOULD!



BBTTPPBPPP!

I HAVE LOWERED THE LIGHTS. I SERVE THE TR...



GOOD. I'LL GO MAKE MYSELF FEEL BETTER BY INFECTING SOME HERETICS WITH ACCELERATED ARJENFLORB SYNDROME. IT'S NOT KILLING ALL THE RIGHT PEOPLE, OR DOING IT FAST ENOUGH, ON ITS OWN!



MAX: AFTER THE FIRST SHOOTER HAD GOTTEN OFF A FEW SHOTS, A SECOND SHOOTER PULLED OUT HIS GUN AND JOINED HIM. WE DUCKED BEHIND TREES AND SHOT BACK. THERE WERE ONLY A FEW OF THEM, BUT THEIR BULLETS TRACKED US, SOMEHOW!



FEY MAGIC CAN IMPROVE SOMEONE'S AIM. NEVER PLAY DARTS WITH A GOBLIN UNLESS THEY'RE FIRST BOUND TO NOT USE MAGIC, AS THE SAYING GOES.



THAT WOULD EXPLAIN IT. THE SEEKING WAS IMPERFECT, AND HIT THE TREES FOR THE MOST PART. WE FINALLY TOOK THEM ALL DOWN, MOSTLY WITH THE CEL-DINO LASERS SET TO WIDE-BEAM.

WILSON

MAX: AND APPARENTLY THE TRACKING STOPPED WHEN THEY DIED. THERE WAS ONE LAST BULLET IN THE AIR, AND IT WAS CURVING TOWARD US UNTIL IT WASN'T. IT ENDED UP GOING RIGHT INTO ME, AND THE MAGUS WAS BEHIND ME AT THE TIME AND LOWER TO THE GROUND, SO IF I HADN'T TAKEN IT, HE WOULD HAVE TAKEN IT. IN THE NECK.



POW!

AGHH! I'VE BEEN SHOT!



FIND THE NEAREST HEALER!

ELSEWHERE, AGAIN...

WHAT?! THEY HAVE TARGET-SEEKING MAGICAL BULLETS, AND ONLY ONE OF THEIR SHOTS CAUSES A DECENT INJURY, LET ALONE GETS ANYWHERE NEAR THE RIGHT TARGET?! I SHOULD HAVE GUIDED THEM MYSELF! IF ONLY THIS MIGRAINE WEREN'T MAKING ME GO CROSS-EYED!



IT FOULED MY AIM! SOME OF THE PEOPLE I INFECTED WERE THE WRONG ONES! WHY MUST SOME OF THEM BE SO MUCH ALIKE?! OH, WELL. RANDOM INFECTIONS SHOULD INCREASE PROPER FEAR OF ME!

BACK AMONG THE GHOSTS...

IS THAT WHEN YOU DIED, MAX? IT WAS NEVER CLEAR TO ME AFTER OUR LAST CONVERSATION.



NO. HE DIDN'T DIE UNTIL A DIFFERENT INCIDENT A FEW WEEKS LATER!



SUSIE'S RIGHT. THE CEL-DINOS' MAGICAL HEALING WORKED MUCH BETTER THAN OUR MUNDANE VERSION, EVEN WITHOUT THE CHICKEN'S RUINING IT.



GOOD!



YOU WERE LUCKY THE GNOMES ONLY HAD MAGICALLY AIMED GUNS, AND NOT ROCKET LAUNCHERS OR SOMETHING! UNLESS THE DINOS' MAGICAL HEALING WAS JUST THAT GOOD!



INDEED. ONE SMALL PIECE OF METAL IMPALING YOU NON-ROBOTS IN THE WRONG PLACE CAN SO EASILY BREAK YOU. SUCH VULNERABILITY SHOULD MAKE YOUR KIND MORE CAUTIOUS, BUT I HAVE LEARNED THAT IT IS NOT THE CASE FROM MANY GHOSTS HERE.



MAX: I CERTAINLY WAS LUCKY. I WAS GOOD AS NEW IN ABOUT FIFTEEN MINUTES, AND THEN THE MAGUS WANTED TO SEE ME ABOUT SOMETHING.



MARS AND SATURN ARE VISIBLE IN THE SKY HERE! THE PROPHECY IS TRUE, AND YOU ARE PART OF IT! THE CHICKEN SHALL FALL!

BUT BEFORE THAT... SINCE YOU TOOK A BULLET MEANT FOR ME AND LIKELY SAVED MY LIFE, WHAT BOON WOULD YOU HAVE FOR THAT?



...SAVE MY NEPHEW.



YOU MEAN LIBERATE HIM THE WAY I DID YOU, YES?



YES. IT'S A WAY TO KEEP HIM OUT OF THE CHICKEN'S TALONS IF THINGS REALLY GO BAD.

I CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT! ALL THOSE ON OUR SIDE IN THE PROPHECY NEED TO BE LIBERATED,



AND YOUR NEPHEW IS AMONG THEM! BRING HIM TO ME (AND THE OTHERS IF YOU CAN), AND I WILL LIBERATE THEM ALL!

THANK YOU! I'M STILL TRYING TO PROCESS EVERYTHING, FROM MY BRUSH WITH DEATH TO THE IDEA THAT I'VE LIKELY BEEN REINCARNATED A BUNCH OF TIMES, AND NOW THERE'S A PROPHECY... SINCE I'M IMMUNE TO TELEPATHY NOW, SHOULDN'T I KNOW THE PROPHECY, SINCE I'M ALSO IN IT?

YOU SHOULD! GIVE ME A MOMENT TO FIND ONE OF OUR LORE-MASTERS!



IF IT'S COMPLEX ENOUGH, IS THERE A SAFE WAY TO WRITE IT DOWN, OR MUST I MEMORIZE IT?



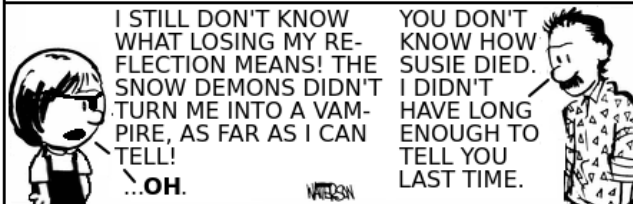
The Prophecy

The destroyers of the chicken are a dimension-traveling chowderhead with the blood of both a hero and a traitor, a nature-twisting seer who gains insight after they start to lose their reflection, a guide who leads them from low paths to high, and a courageous animus who channels the power of six. Only when the chowderhead and the seer are brought together will destiny begin to guide, and only when the power of six becomes known to all four will destiny be fulfilled.

The hero will save a wizard when worlds of war and liberation are seen twice over, and die when someone they trust turns on them. The traitor will gain and lose power by betraying everyone they hold dear, last of all themselves. The reflection will take the blow meant for what it reflects. The guide will be hidden from their enemies until those they must guide know what must be done. The animus will fight the rear while the other

three fight the front.

Through their allies, the four will bring together the powers of gods, celestials, fey, and demons; and the strengths of technology, magic, logic, illogic, and goblin know-how. The day will be won by the twisting of space and the unexpected changing of sides.



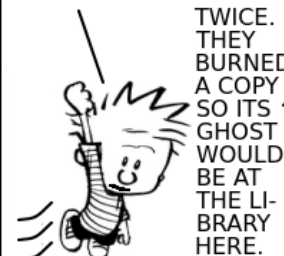
ELSEWHERE, AGAIN...

THE GUN GNOME SQUAD IS ALL DEAD, BUT MOST OF THEIR CORPSES ARE INTACT ENOUGH THAT I CAN LISTEN THROUGH THEIR EARS! WHAT?! THE RANDOM MAN WHO GOT SHOT IS HEARING ABOUT A PROPHECY?! IF BREZZIK WEREN'T ALREADY DEAD AND UNOFFICIALLY OUT OF MY RANGE...! I'LL TAKE IT OUT ON HIS BLOODLINE! THE ENTIRE SHOOTERBERG CLAN IS OFFICIALLY UP FOR SPECIAL PUNISHMENT! THEY'LL PAY FOR ALL THE TIMES BREZZIK TOLD ME TO MATE WITH MYSELF FOR POINTING OUT HIS MISTAKES! GRRR!



BACK AMONG THE GHOSTS, AGAIN...

THAT'S A LONG AND COMPLICATED PROPHECY! AT LEAST THEY LET YOU WRITE IT DOWN!



TWICE. THEY BURNED A COPY SO ITS GHOST WOULD BE AT THE LIBRARY HERE.

I "STARTED LOSING" YOU JUST BEFORE MY DEAL WITH THE SNOW DEMONS ON... MARCH FOURTEENTH OF THAT REALLY COLD YEAR?

I CAME DOWN WITH ARJENFLORB SYNDROME ON THE THIRTEENTH!



SO YOU WERE ONE OF THE ANOMALOUS CASES OF IT? WHAT DID OUR PARENTS DO?



I WAS AN ANOMALOUS AND **ACCELERATED** CASE! THEY DIDN'T EXPECT THAT! WE MOVED OUT OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD I'D GROWN UP IN, TRYING TO FIND A DOCTOR WHO'D BOTHER TREATING IT!



SO **THAT'S** WHY YOU MOVED AWAY OUT OF THE BLUE! LACK OF TREATMENT OPTIONS, PLUS THE STIGMA OF ITS BEING A LOWER-CLASS DISEASE! YIKES!



AND MY CLIENT'S MATE WITH IT, FROM MY SECOND JOB, SHOWED ME EXACTLY HOW THE SYNDROME PROGRESSES AT NORMAL SPEED, WHICH IS BAD ENOUGH!



IT IS A SHAME THAT MALADIES UNJUSTLY GET SORTED BY CLASS.

ROBOTS HAVE LOWER CLASSES AND DISEASES?



IT'S A LONG STORY, WHICH BRIAN TOLD US WHEN HE GOT HERE.



WE HAVE FAULTY MANUFACTURING AND PROGRAMMING. LOWER CLASSES WERE MORE OF A PROBLEM IN ANCIENT TIMES, WHERE ONES IN ORANGE PLATING WERE PRIVILEGED OVER ONES IN BLUE PLATING, DESPITE BEING OTHERWISE IDENTICAL.



IT IS NOT SOMETHING WE ARE PROUD OF TODAY, DESPITE A FEW ATAVISMS WHO ARE.

YOU KNEW HER, THEN? AND I GUESS THIS IS HOW MAX LEARNED ABOUT THE HOLY DOCTORS?



NO, I ONLY HEARD ABOUT HER FROM MAX AFTER I DIED. WE DID END UP IN THE SAME PLACE, BUT NOT

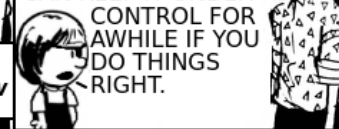


AT THE SAME TIME. AS FOR THE HOLY DOCTORS, YES.



ARJENFLORB SYNDROME IS ONE OF THE SYSTEMIC DISEASES: INABILITY TO KEEP FOOD DOWN, LIMB WEAKNESS, BAD BALANCE, DISRUPTED SLEEP SCHEDULE... A LOT OF DIFFERENT THINGS ARE AFFECTED.

I'VE HEARD YOU CAN KEEP IT UNDER CONTROL FOR AWHILE IF YOU DO THINGS RIGHT.

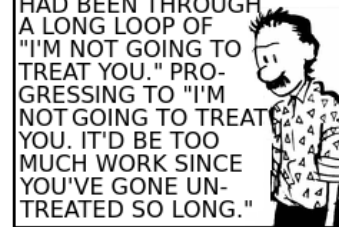


ONLY IF YOU AREN'T TOO POOR TO AFFORD WHAT YOU NEED TO KEEP IT UNDER CONTROL, AND YOU DON'T HAVE CERTAIN ALLERGIES THAT GET IN THE WAY OF THAT. MY CLIENT'S MATE WON THE BAD LUCK LOTTERY FOR BOTH.

I GOT SOME SYMPATHY FOR BEING A KID. SHE DIDN'T.

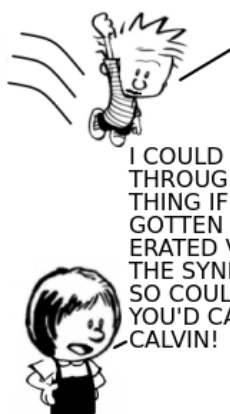


THE SONG MOSTLY DOES THEM JUSTICE, BUT MISSES A FEW DETAILS. THEY'D EFFECTIVELY TORTURE THEIR NON-RICH PATIENTS WHEN THEY DIDN'T LEAVE THEM TO DIE. MY CLIENT'S MATE HAD BEEN THROUGH A LONG LOOP OF "I'M NOT GOING TO TREAT YOU." PROGRESSING TO "I'M NOT GOING TO TREAT YOU. IT'D BE TOO MUCH WORK SINCE YOU'VE GONE UNTREATED SO LONG."



SHE HAD GOTTEN SOME TREATMENT OVER THE YEARS, BUT IT WASN'T CONSISTENT ENOUGH TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, BECAUSE NO DOCTORS WERE REQUIRED TO TREAT HER OUTSIDE A HOSPITAL, AND EVEN THEN... I HAD SLIGHTLY BETTER LUCK, BUT IT DIDN'T LAST.





WHY IS SHE SO IMPORTANT, WHEN SHE WAS JUST THE SIGNIFICANT OTHER OF ONE OF YOUR CLIENTS? NOT THAT SHE DESERVED TO GO THROUGH ALL THAT!

I COULD HAVE GONE THROUGH THE SAME THING IF I HADN'T GOTTEN THE ACCELERATED VERSION OF THE SYNDROME! AND SO COULD YOU, IF YOU'D CAUGHT IT, CALVIN!

EXACTLY. IT WAS WHAT SHOWED ME HOW BAD THE SYSTEMS SET UP BY THE CHICKEN **REALLY** WERE.



SHE'D GONE THROUGH SO MANY DOCTORS THAT SHE'D HAD TO DEAL WITH THE BIG FOUR **PERSONALLY**. I WASN'T A DIRECT WITNESS TO IT ALL, BUT WHAT I **DID** SEE WAS MORE THAN ENOUGH. IT WAS MUCH LIKE MY EXPERIENCE IN THE FIRST LIBERTY TOWN, OR WHAT IT **WOULD** HAVE BEEN IF I HADN'T BEEN ABLE TO GET OUT AND FIND ANOTHER.



WHAT WERE THE FOUR LIKE?

LIKE ANYONE WITH TOO MUCH POWER AND TOO LITTLE FEAR OF WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THEY MISUSED IT, WHETHER MORTAL, DEMIGOD, OR ANYTHING ELSE.



MY CLIENT TOLD ME THE SHORT VERSION OF WHAT SHE'D BEEN THROUGH ALREADY. ONE OF THE FOUR SAID, "IF YOU LOOK AT THE WRONG THING, I'M NOT GOING TO TREAT YOU;" SHE TRIED TO QUALIFY AS DISABLED WITH ANOTHER OF THE FOUR, WHO SAID, "I'M NOT GOING TO SIGN A PIECE OF PAPER TO HELP SOMEONE GET ON **DISABILITY**;" THE THIRD THREW AN HOURLONG TANTRUM ABOUT HOW SHE NEEDED TO ALWAYS TAKE HER MEDICATION ON TIME (DESPITE HER DISRUPTED SLEEP SCHEDULE), FILLED THE PRESCRIPTION FOR HER MEDICATION EXACTLY ONCE, AND BLEW HER OFF WHEN SHE TRIED TO GET IT REFILLED; THE FOURTH WAS THE ONE IN THE HOSPITAL WHEN SHE GOT BAD ENOUGH THAT SHE HAD TO GO THERE, WHERE HE **HAD** TO TREAT HER.



DID THAT WORK OUT ANY BETTER?

NO. THE HOSPITALS HAD A TIME LIMIT ON HOW LONG YOU COULD STAY THERE, AND THEN YOU'D GET THROWN OUT WHETHER YOU WERE HEALED OR NOT.

HOW RIDICULOUS!



IT'S WORSE THAN RIDICULOUS, IT'S EITHER NEGLECTFUL OR MALICIOUS. HE TOLD HER SHE NEEDED A SPECIAL DIET TO KEEP THE SYNDROME UNDER CONTROL, BUT COULDN'T BE BOTHERED TO TELL HER WHAT IT WAS, AND THEN TWISTED EVERYTHING SHE AND MY CLIENT SAID INTO AN EXCUSE TO GET RID OF HER. EVEN BEFORE THAT, HE HAD IT IN FOR HER.



SO HE COULD BE FORCED TO DO HIS SUPPOSED JOB, BUT NOT FORCED TO ACTUALLY DO IT WELL?

EXACTLY. THE HOSPITAL HAD PHYSICAL THERAPISTS WHO WERE SUPPOSED TO HELP HER REGAIN SOME STRENGTH IN HER WEAKENED LIMBS, BUT WHEN SHE WAS PHYSICALLY UNABLE TO DO SOME OF THE EXERCISES, THEY SAID IT WAS JUST "FEAR" ON HER PART AND WROTE ON HER PAPERWORK THAT SHE "REFUSED" TO DO THEM, AND THE SO-CALLED DOCTOR WENT ALONG WITH THAT AS AN EXCUSE TO THROW HER OUT FASTER.



WHAT HAPPENED TO HER AFTER THAT?

SHE WAS WORRIED ABOUT HAVING HER INABILITY TO KEEP FOOD DOWN COME BACK, AND NEITHER SHE NOR MY CLIENT HAD REBELLED ENOUGH AGAINST THE CHICKEN TO GET THE PRIVILEGES I DID, SO THEY WERE IN BAD HOUSING WHERE SHE WAS LIKELY TO HAVE A HEALTH CRISIS AGAIN SOON. THE SO-CALLED DOCTOR DISMISSED IT AS "SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND NON-SENSE PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES," THREW A FIT, AND STOMPED OUT LIKE A PETULANT TODDLER. I WAS A DIRECT WITNESS TO IT ALL. AND YES, HER SYMPTOMS **DID** COME BACK, BUT SHE ENDED UP RIGHT BACK THERE IN FRONT OF HIM, SO...



THEY DIDN'T REBEL **ENOUGH**? THAT ACTUALLY MADE A DIFFERENCE?

RIGHT. MY BANDMATES AND I HAD GOTTEN JAIL TIME, BUT NEITHER OF THEM HAD ANGERED THE CHICKEN'S AUTHORITIES QUITE ENOUGH FOR THAT. MOST OF THEIR REBELLION WAS ON THE RELIGIOUS FRONT. REGARDING THAT, HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF TIGHMANISM?



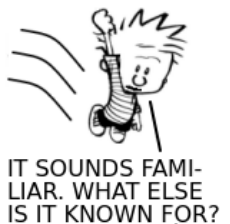
MY COUSIN MENTIONED IT ONCE AS AN EXAMPLE OF A BAD RELIGION BECAUSE ITS FOUNDER WAS A MORTAL WOMAN WHO DIDN'T KNOW HER PLACE. DESPITE MY COUSIN'S BEING A WOMAN, TOO.

I SUPPOSE SHE ALSO SAID THAT JILL TIGHMAN'S BURNING TO DEATH IN A MEANINGLESS ACCIDENT WAS HER GETTING WHAT SHE DESERVED? AS OPPOSED TO THE TIGHMANITE VIEW THAT LIFE DOESN'T NEED MEANING, WE SHOULD TAKE JOY IN ITS MEANINGLESSNESS, AND HER DEATH WAS A FULFILLMENT OF THAT?



I'M NOT SURE.

I GUESS? SHE **DID** SAY THEY WERE CRAZY! I REMEMBER THAT MUCH!



IT SOUNDS FAMILIAR. WHAT ELSE IS IT KNOWN FOR?

LET'S SEE. DON'T DO ANYTHING JUST FOR CONFORMITY OR VANITY'S SAKE; THE ONLY UNIVERSAL THING IS OVERKILL; THE UNIVERSE IS THE DIVINE MADNESS AND ALL GODS ARE FRAGMENTS OF IT...



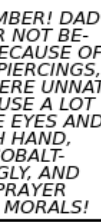
IF IT DOESN'T HAVE THE PLEROMA COUNCIL, WHICH YOU KNOW IS HERE, IS IT EVEN FROM THIS REALITY?

GOOD QUESTION! IT ISN'T. HUMAN REFUGEES FROM ANOTHER REALITY BROUGHT IT HERE TO ONE OF THE LIBERTY TOWNS.

MAX: IT SPREAD TO SEVERAL OTHER LIBERTY TOWNS FROM THERE, AND GAINED CONVERTS. CALVIN: WAIT... ARE THEY THE ONES WHO SAY, "THE DIVINE MADNESS DOES WHAT IT WILL," AND DON'T PRAY?

MAX: EXACTLY! "DOES A TIGHMANITE PRAY?" IS FOR OBVIOUS NO QUESTIONS.

CALVIN: NOW I REMEMBER! DAD RANTED ABOUT THEIR NOT BEING CONSERVATIVE BECAUSE OF THEIR TATTOOS AND PIERCINGS, COMPLAINED THEY WERE UNNATURAL MUTANTS BECAUSE A LOT OF THEM HAD PURPLE EYES AND SIX FINGERS ON EACH HAND, COMPLAINED THEIR COBALT-BLUE ROBES WERE UGLY, AND SAID THEIR LACK OF PRAYER MEANT THEY HAD NO MORALS!



SO IT DOESN'T HAVE THAT PLETHORA COUNCIL YOU TALKED ABOUT WITH BRIAN, AND IT OVERLAPS WITH DISCORDIANISM?

IT'S THE **PLEROMA** COUNCIL, AND IT ONLY OVERLAPS WITH DISCORDIANISM IN SOME ABSURDIST VIEWS.





I ALSO REMEMBER BECAUSE HE SAID THERE WAS NO POINT IN HAVING A GOD UNLESS YOU COULD CURRY FAVOR WITH HIM AND MAKE HIM DO WHAT YOU WANTED. THE PROBLEM WAS, AN ATHEIST HAD GOTTEN ON TV A FEW WEEKS BEFORE AND SAID THE EXACT SAME THING, AND HE'D RANTED THEN ABOUT HOW THE ATHEIST WAS COMPLETELY WRONG. I POINTED THAT OUT, AND HE DID THE "IT'S **NOT** THE SAME THING!" BIT AND GROUNDED ME FOR A WEEK FOR CONTRADICTING HIM.



SINCE WHEN DO ATHEISTS GET ON TV?



DAD SOMETIMES LIKES TO WATCH THE "NON-CONSERVATIVE VIEWS AND WHY THEY'RE WRONG" SHOW SO HE CAN FEEL VINDICATED.



BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY, IF HE'S SO SURE OF HIS VIEWS, HE NEEDS TO HAVE THEM CONSTANTLY REINFORCED.

NEITHER DO I.



THE TIGHMANITES HAVE A FAIR AMOUNT OF LITERATURE ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAVE GODS ONLY TO TREAT THEM LIKE SLAVES WHILE



CALLING THEM FRIENDS, ODDLY ENOUGH. AND IF MY BROTHER THINKS THE TIGHMANITES ARE MUTANTS, HE SHOULD TAKE A LOOK AT THE LAUWINISTS SOMETIME!

LAO-SOMETHINGS? ARE THEY ANOTHER GROUP OF HUMANS FROM ANOTHER REALITY? HOW MANY REFUGEES FROM OTHER REALITIES ARE THERE?



MORE THAN YOU KNOW, AND IT'S TOO LONG OF A STORY TO TELL HERE AND NOW. TO GET BACK TO THE SO-CALLED DOCTOR BUSINESS, MY CLIENT WAS A CONVERT TO TIGHMANISM, AND HIS MATE WAS A MALCHICKENIST.

CALVIN: WHAT'S THAT?

MAX: MALCHICKENISM IS THE BELIEF THAT THE CHICKEN IS THE ONE GOD, BUT HE'S AN EVIL SLAVEOWNER AND NOT WORTHY OF WORSHIP. BOTH HIS BELIEFS AND HERS OFFENDED THE DOCTORS, WHO WERE GOOD CHICKENISTS (OR PRETENDING TO BE AT THE TIME), BUT WEREN'T OFFENSIVE ENOUGH TO GAIN THEM ANY REAL POINTS IN THE LOCAL LIBERTY TOWN.

SARANNA: AND, LIKE ALL LIBERTY TOWNS, IT ONLY EXISTS BECAUSE THE CHICKEN PERMITS IT, REGARDLESS OF HOW FREE THEIR RESIDENTS THINK THEY ARE.

MAX: IT'S IRONIC, YES.

ANYWAY, AFTER THE DOCTOR LIED THAT HER CONCERNS WERE ALL IN HER HEAD AND LEFT, THE NURSES SAID HE WAS JUST



"TELLING IT LIKE IT IS." THE SONG DOESN'T MENTION THAT THE BIG FOUR HAD ALL THEIR NURSES LICKING THEIR BOOTS. AND THEN SHE ENDED UP IN THE WORST PLACE OF ALL.

HOW COULD THINGS GET WORSE? I GUESS THE SONG LEFT EVEN MORE OUT?



EXACTLY. HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF THE... AHM, JOKE ABOUT WHY THE BUTT-VICEROY IS CALLED

THE OLD TRINITY?



NO...



MAX: BECAUSE THE NEW TRINITY IS INSURANCE, DOCTORS, AND REHAB/NURSING HOMES. INSURANCE SAYS NO TO EVERYTHING WITHOUT SEEING YOU PERSONALLY, DOCTORS SAY NO TO EVERYTHING WHILE SEEING YOU PERSONALLY, AND REHAB/NURSING HOMES SAY NO TO EVERYTHING WHILE KEEPING YOU PERSONALLY LOCKED UP. THE LAST IS WHERE SHE ENDED UP.

CALVIN: WHY IS INSURANCE IMPORTANT?

MAX: BECAUSE WITHOUT INSURANCE, YOU CAN'T PAY FOR ANYTHING UNLESS YOU'RE RICH.

SARANNA: BUT IF DOCTORS SAY NO TO EVERYTHING EVEN WHEN YOU HAVE INSURANCE AND CAN PAY THEM, WHY DOES INSURANCE MATTER AT ALL?

MAX: ONLY THE CHICKEN KNOWS!

MY CLIENT OBJECTED TO THE DOCTOR'S BEHAVIOR, BUT HE COULDN'T OBJECT TOO STRONGLY, OR HE'D BE KICKED OUT OF THE HOSPITAL FOR AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR.



AFTER THE SO-CALLED DOCTOR WAS AGGRESSIVE ENOUGH TO THROW A FIT OVER HAVING TO KEEP DOING WHAT HE WAS PAID TO DO?



RIGHT. IF HE'D CHANNIELED THAT AGGRESSION TOWARDS DOING HIS JOB, HIS PATIENTS WOULD BE MUCH BETTER OFF, BUT YOU COULD SAY THAT ABOUT ALL THE BIG FOUR. ONLY THE CHICKEN COULD FORCE THEM TO DO WELL, AND HE WOULDN'T DO THAT FOR NON-RICH OR HERETICS.

SARANNA: WHAT ABOUT DOCTORS BELOW THE BIG FOUR? WAS THERE ANY WAY TO MAKE THEM DO THEIR JOBS, OR TO REMOVE THEM IF YOU COULDN'T?

MAX: YOU COULD REMOVE ONE IF A NURSE OF THEIRS DEVELOPED A CONSCIENCE AND TURNED THEM IN, BUT THAT WAS SO RARE IT MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN WINNING THE LOTTERY. MY CLIENT'S MATE DID HAVE A FEW GOOD ONES HELPING HER WITH SOME PARTS OF ARJENFLORB, BUT IT DIDN'T AMOUNT TO MUCH WITH ONE OF THE BIG FOUR AROUND TO OVERRIDE THEM. AND THE REHAB/NURSING HOME DIDN'T HELP AT ALL.

IS THIS WHERE THE TORTURE PART COMES IN? ASIDE FROM THE HOURLONG-TANTRUM DOCTOR WHO FILLED HER PRESCRIPTION ONCE AND NEVER AGAIN, WHO WAS BASICALLY TWISTING THE KNIFE?



YES, WHICH IS WHY I'LL BE CUTTING THIS PART SHORT. YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENS WHEN EVEN



ORDINARY HEALTH CARE WORKERS HAVE NO ONE HOLDING THEM BACK. ESPECIALLY WHEN SOME OF THEM HAD FLUNKED OUT OF CHILD CARE POSITIONS BEFOREHAND.

DID YOU HAVE TO GO THROUGH ANYTHING LIKE THIS, TOO?

...YES, BUT NOT FOR LONG. MY PART IN THIS STORY'S COMING RIGHT UP.

WHAT A NIGHTMARE!



INDEED. THE FACILITY HAD TO HAVE A DOCTOR IN CHARGE, AND IT'S FUNNY THAT YOU BRING UP **THAT** MEMBER OF THE BIG FOUR. SHE WAS THE ONE.

LIKE THAT ISN'T OMINOUS!



IT WASN'T THAT BAD AT FIRST. SHE HAD BETTER RESULTS WITH THE PHYSICAL THERAPY THERE, AND SHE'D HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GO HOME AND GET THERAPY IF SHE AND MY CLIENT COULD GET INTO DISABLED-FRIENDLY HOUSING FIRST. OR AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT THE DOCTOR SAID. MAKE OF THAT WHAT YOU WILL.



THERE WAS A BROUHAHA WITH TRYING TO GET THE FACILITY TO ACTUALLY PROVIDE A LIST OF THE MEDICATIONS THEY WERE GIVING MY CLIENT'S MATE. THAT WAS A SIGN OF THINGS TO COME. FIRST, PHYSICAL THERAPY WAS KEEPING HER STRENGTH UP, BUT HER INSURANCE DECIDED SHE WASN'T PROGRESSING FAST ENOUGH.



THEY HAD AS MUCH CARE FOR KEEPING THE PLAGUE OUT AS THEY DID FOR HELPING THEIR PATIENTS IN GENERAL.



AT LEAST DOCTORS AND INSURANCE HAVE TO KEEP UP THE APPEARANCE OF DOING SOMETHING!

YES, EVEN THOUGH A LOT OF THEM HATE IT.



MY CLIENT FILLED ME IN ON WHAT HAPPENED. AT THAT POINT, THE ARJENFLORB SYNDROME HAD WEAKENED HIS MATE'S ARMS SIGNIFICANTLY, WHICH WAS A BAD SIGN ON TOP OF THE PLAGUE, BUT SHE TOLD HIM SHE'D CONTACT HIM WHEN IT WAS SAFE TO COME BACK. A WEEK AND A HALF LATER, HE GOT A PHONE CALL.



SO IT'S LIKE THAT MOVIE I OVERHEARD MOM WATCHING BEHIND DAD'S BACK ONCE, ABOUT THE DEAD GUY BROUGHT BACK BY A BIRD TO AVENGE BOTH HIS AND HIS GIRLFRIEND'S DEATH? OR AT LEAST THE ONE PART NEAR THE END?

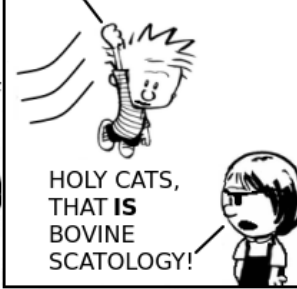
FROM WHAT YOU'VE POINTED OUT, IT WAS PROBABLY A WAY TO TWIST THE KNIFE AGAIN. HOW LONG WERE THE TANTRUMS SHE THREW THIS TIME?



SO THEY CUT HER OFF SO SHE COULDN'T PROGRESS AT ALL ANYMORE? YIKES!



AS GRANDMA SAID THE LAST TIME SHE VISITED, THAT'S BOVINE SCATOLOGY!



HOLY CATS, THAT IS BOVINE SCATOLOGY!

ACTUALLY, SHE **DIDN'T** THROW ANY THIS TIME, AND SEEMED TO BE IN A BETTER MOOD. OF COURSE, SHE WAS ONLY AT THE FACILITY EVERY FEW WEEKS, AND IT'D BEEN A FEW YEARS SINCE SHE'D HAD MY CLIENT'S MATE AS A PATIENT, SO SHE LIKELY FORGOT SOME THINGS.



YES. AND HER MEDICATIONS DIDN'T HELP HER THAT MUCH. SHE WAS EITHER PASSING OUT RANDOMLY OR STILL UNABLE TO KEEP FOOD DOWN, EVEN THOUGH THE MEDICATIONS WERE SUPPOSED TO FIX THAT.



SOMEONE ELSE HAD TO FILL IN FOR ME THAT WEEK, AS I'D SHUFFLED MY SCHEDULE AROUND FOR THE MISSION TO RESCUE THE MAGUS AND THE OTHER REFUGEES. THAT TIME IS WHEN EVERYTHING REALLY FELL APART.



WHAT'S THAT SAYING? THE AXE FORGETS, BUT THE TREE REMEMBERS? AND WAS YOUR CLIENT'S MATE SUPPOSED TO BE GRATEFUL THAT SHE WAS IN A GOOD ENOUGH MOOD TO ACT LIKE A PROFESSIONAL?



YES, AND APPARENTLY SO.



SOUNDS LIKE THE HOSPITAL, IN THAT THEY DIDN'T CARE IF SHE GOT BETTER AS LONG AS THEY GOT PAID.



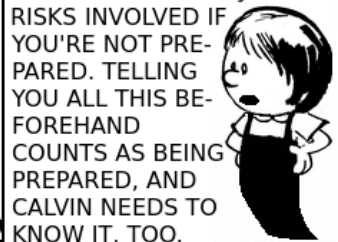
EXACTLY. AND THEN THERE WAS THE PLAGUE OUTBREAK THAT SPREAD UNCHECKED!

WHAT?!



MAX: MY CLIENT WAS VISITING HIS MATE IN THE FACILITY ONCE A WEEK IN ORDER TO KEEP THEIR HOUSING, BUT THE ISSUES CAUSED BY THE SUPPOSED TREATMENTS THEY WERE GIVING HER THREW THAT SCHEDULE OFF. THEY'D HAD NO LUCK FINDING DISABLED-FRIENDLY HOUSING, BUT BEING UNDERPRIVILEGED IN A LIBERTY TOWN VIRTUALLY ENSURED THAT. AFTER NOT HEARING FROM HER FOR LONG ENOUGH, HE VISITED ANYWAY. FUNNY HOW HE GOT A MASK AND GOWN TO KEEP FROM CATCHING THE PLAGUE, BUT SHE DIDN'T. CALVIN: *SPEECHLESS* SARANNA: DARE I ASK HOW THIS ENDS? MAX: NOT WELL.

SOMETHING I'VE LEARNED FROM THE LIBRARIES HERE IS THAT IDENTICAL TWINS CAN SHARE MEMORIES. BUT IT'S INSTANTANEOUS, AND THERE ARE MAJOR RISKS INVOLVED IF YOU'RE NOT PREPARED. TELLING YOU ALL THIS BEFOREHAND COUNTS AS BEING PREPARED, AND CALVIN NEEDS TO KNOW IT, TOO.



GIVEN YOUR EXPRESSION, I'M GUESSING SOMETHING ELSE WENT WRONG? I DON'T EVEN **KNOW** THIS PERSON, BUT IF MY SISTER HAD TO GO THROUGH A FASTER VERSION OF WHAT SHE DID, SHE HAS MY SYMPATHY!



BUT WHY THIS STORY FIRST? IT HASN'T TAKEN AS LONG AS THE KRALTAR STORY, AND IT'S INTERESTING IN A COMPLETELY HORRIFYING WAY...



IT HAS TO BE IN THE RIGHT ORDER. SUSIE KNOWS WHY.



I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN.



"I HAVE SOMETHING FOR YOU. I DON'T WANT IT ANYMORE. THIRTY HOURS OF PAIN, ALL AT ONCE."

PRETTY MUCH, EXCEPT FOR THE AMOUNT OF TIME. MY CLIENT'S MATE SUFFERED FOR MONTHS, WHILE SUSIE'S ACCELERATED SYNDROME MEANT SHE ONLY SUFFERED FOR WEEKS. TAKING WEEKS ALL AT ONCE WOULD DO MUCH WORSE THAN KNOCK YOU OUT FOR A WHILE, IF YOU WERE UNPREPARED.



MAX: AS FOR DEATH, THAT'S WHAT THE PHONE CALL TO MY CLIENT WAS ABOUT. AN HOUR AFTER THE FACILITY'S USUAL CHECKUP, OR SO THEY SAID, THEY FOUND HER UNRESPONSIVE AND ASKED HIM WHETHER THEY SHOULD TRY CPR. HE AGREED. THEY CALLED AGAIN IN A BIT SAYING THEY COULDN'T REVIVE HER. SARANNA: AT LEAST SHE WASN'T SUFFERING ANYMORE. MAX: NOT SO FAST. THE CHICKEN'S SYSTEM WASN'T DONE WITH THEM YET. WHEN I SHOWED UP FOR MY JOB WITH HIM THE NEXT DAY, I HAD TO HELP HIM SORT THINGS OUT. BUT GOOD CHICKENISTS NEVER PASS UP OPPORTUNITIES TO HURT HERETICS. I KNEW THAT INTELLECTUALLY, BUT **SEEING** IT WAS DIFFERENT.



SO THE CHICKEN'S MEDICAL SYSTEM, FROM DOCTORS TO INSURANCE TO REHAB/NURSING HOMES, IS DESIGNED TO MAKE SURE ONLY HIS PREFERRED PEOPLE GET GOOD HEALTH CARE WHENEVER POSSIBLE. I GET THAT. BUT WHAT IN THE NAME OF SAINT GULIK COULD THEY DO AFTER ALL THAT?

WHEN I TOOK MY CLIENT OVER TO THE REHAB/NURSING HOME FACILITY (AFTER THEY REMOVED HER BODY) IN ORDER TO GET HER THINGS, I EXPECTED HIM TO BE IN SHOCK. HE WAS, BUT NOT FOR THE REASONS I

THOUGHT, ACCORDING TO HIM, ALL OF HER THINGS WERE IN THE **EXACT** SAME POSITIONS THAT THEY WERE IN A WEEK AND A HALF BEFORE, WHEN HE SAW HER LAST!

SHE SAID MY CLIENT'S MATE DIDN'T HAVE THE CONDITION. THEN AGAIN, SHE WAS ONE OF THE BIG FOUR, SO CHOOSING BETWEEN "DO WORK AND STERILIZE THE HERETIC" AND "DO NOTHING AND LET THE HERETIC DIE" WAS A NO-BRAINER: THE SECOND.

GIVEN THAT SHE ALSO SIGNED THE DEATH CERTIFICATE LATER, IT ALSO FITS.

MY CLIENT WAS POOR AND (I HATE TO USE THIS PHRASE, BUT IT APPLIES) VISIBLY DISABLED. HE'D NEVER BEEN ABLE TO COME OFF AS THREATENING IN HIS LIFE, MUCH LESS HIRE

ANYONE TO MAKE THREATS FOR HIM WITHOUT PUTTING HIM AT RISK. THE IDEA OF HIS SUCCESSFULLY THREATENING THE CHICKENISTS WAS A JOKE.

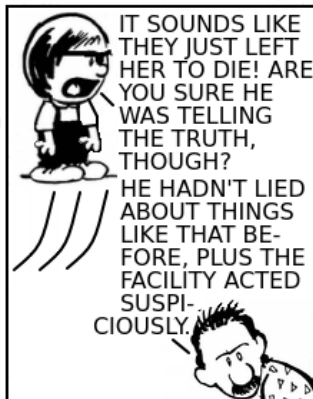
THE SAME COULD APPLY TO HIS MATE. ALL THEY HAD WERE EACH OTHER. THE HOUSING THEY WERE IN HAD THE PAPERWORK IN HER NAME, BUT SHE'D SET THINGS UP SO THAT IF

SOMETHING HAPPENED TO HER, HE COULD KEEP ON LIVING THERE. BUT THAT WEAK POINT WAS WHAT THE CHICKENISTS LEANED ON.



I'M NOT FAMILIAR WITH THAT SAINT.

ERIS DISCORDIA'S MESSENGER, A.K.A. HERMES OR MERCURY. IT TURNS OUT HE **ISN'T** THE GOD OF FLOWERS AND BOUQUETS!



IT SOUNDS LIKE THEY JUST LEFT HER TO DIE! ARE YOU SURE HE WAS TELLING THE TRUTH, THOUGH?

HE HADN'T LIED ABOUT THINGS LIKE THAT BEFORE, PLUS THE FACILITY ACTED SUSPICIOUSLY.



SO WHAT HAPPENED NEXT? YOU SAID THE CHICKENISTS DID WORSE, BUT THEY HAVE NO AUTHORITY IN LIBERTY TOWNS, YOU SAID!

UNFORTUNATELY, THEY CAN UNOFFICIALLY LEAN ON PEOPLE.



BUT THEY, AS THE SERVANTS OF THE, AH, ONE TRUE GOD, ALWAYS HAVE TO WIN, RIGHT?

RIGHT. IT'S A MATTER OF PRIDE FOR THEM, INHERITED FROM THE OLD TRINITY.



THEY DID SOMETHING TO BREAK THAT?

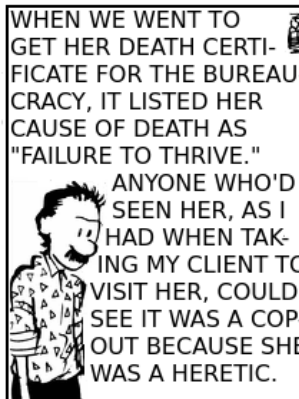
THEY HAD THE RULES CHANGED IN THE NAME OF "EFFICIENCY," SO HE NO LONGER QUALIFIED IF SHE WASN'T THERE.



HE HELPS TAKE THE DEAD WHERE THEY NEED TO GO, AND HE'S NOW IN THE FORM OF A ROACH, SO HE'S A WEIRD BUG!

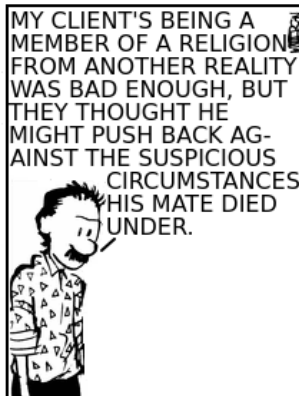


SO YOU FINALLY LEARNED ABOUT MERCURY, LONG AFTER WE HAD TO DO THAT REPORT ON IT! HAH!

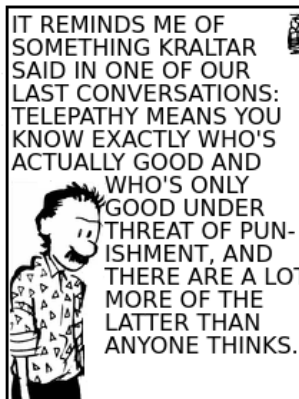


WHEN WE WENT TO GET HER DEATH CERTIFICATE FOR THE BUREAUCRACY, IT LISTED HER CAUSE OF DEATH AS "FAILURE TO THRIVE."

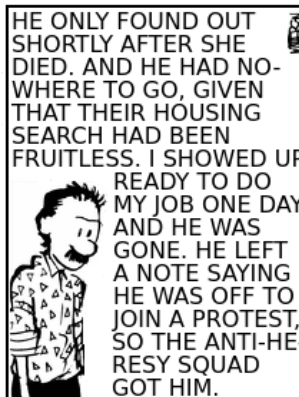
ANYONE WHO'D SEEN HER, AS I HAD WHEN TAKING MY CLIENT TO VISIT HER, COULD SEE IT WAS A COP-OUT BECAUSE SHE WAS A HERETIC.



MY CLIENT'S BEING A MEMBER OF A RELIGION FROM ANOTHER REALITY WAS BAD ENOUGH, BUT THEY THOUGHT HE MIGHT PUSH BACK AGAINST THE SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES HIS MATE DIED UNDER.

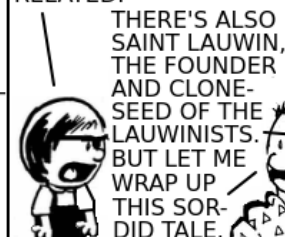


IT REMINDS ME OF SOMETHING KRALTAR SAID IN ONE OF OUR LAST CONVERSATIONS: TELEPATHY MEANS YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHO'S ACTUALLY GOOD AND WHO'S ONLY GOOD UNDER THREAT OF PUNISHMENT, AND THERE ARE A LOT MORE OF THE LATTER THAN ANYONE THINKS.

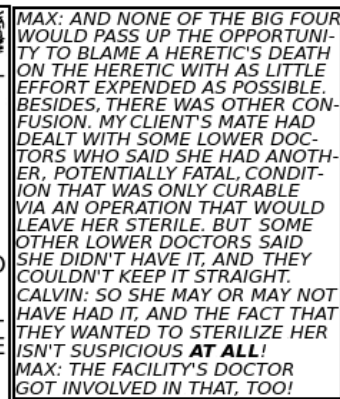


HE ONLY FOUND OUT SHORTLY AFTER SHE DIED. AND HE HAD NOWHERE TO GO, GIVEN THAT THEIR HOUSING SEARCH HAD BEEN FRUITLESS. I SHOWED UP READY TO DO MY JOB ONE DAY, AND HE WAS GONE. HE LEFT A NOTE SAYING HE WAS OFF TO JOIN A PROTEST, SO THE ANTI-HERESY SQUAD GOT HIM.

IT'S STILL GOOD TO FILL IN THE GAPS IN MY KNOWLEDGE, AND WITH SOMETHING NON-CHICKEN-RELATED.



THERE'S ALSO SAINT LAUWIN, THE FOUNDER AND CLONE-SEED OF THE LAUWINISTS. BUT LET ME WRAP UP THIS SORDID TALE.



MAX: AND NONE OF THE BIG FOUR WOULD PASS UP THE OPPORTUNITY TO BLAME A HERETIC'S DEATH ON THE HERETIC WITH AS LITTLE EFFORT EXPENDED AS POSSIBLE. BESIDES, THERE WAS OTHER CONFUSION. MY CLIENT'S MATE HAD DEALT WITH SOME LOWER DOCTORS WHO SAID SHE HAD ANOTHER, POTENTIALLY FATAL, CONDITION THAT WAS ONLY CURABLE VIA AN OPERATION THAT WOULD LEAVE HER STERILE. BUT SOME OTHER LOWER DOCTORS SAID SHE DIDN'T HAVE IT, AND THEY COULDN'T KEEP IT STRAIGHT. CALVIN: SO SHE MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE HAD IT, AND THE FACT THAT THEY WANTED TO STERILIZE HER ISN'T SUSPICIOUS AT ALL! MAX: THE FACILITY'S DOCTOR GOT INVOLVED IN THAT, TOO!



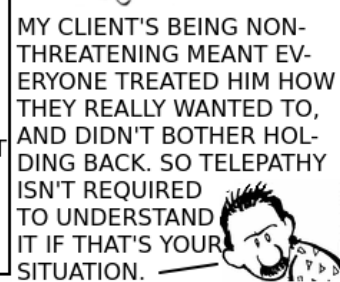
THAT WOULD TAKE A LOT OF MONEY, BUT THE CHICKEN FAVORS THE RICH, SO HE WOULDN'T BE IN ANY POSITION TO DO SO. IT'S AN EXCUSE TO TARGET HIM, TOO!



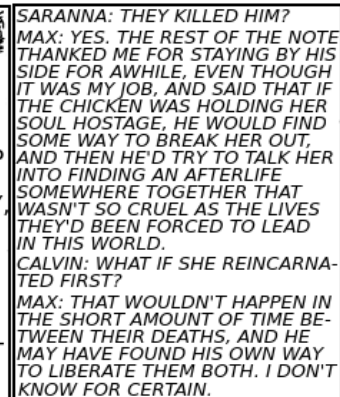
NOW YOU'RE GETTING IT!



HOW DOES IT REMIND YOU, THOUGH?



MY CLIENT'S BEING NON-THREATENING MEANT EVERYONE TREATED HIM HOW THEY REALLY WANTED TO, AND DIDN'T BOTHER HOLDING BACK. SO TELEPATHY ISN'T REQUIRED TO UNDERSTAND IT IF THAT'S YOUR SITUATION.



SARANNA: THEY KILLED HIM? MAX: YES. THE REST OF THE NOTE THANKED ME FOR STAYING BY HIS SIDE FOR AWHILE, EVEN THOUGH IT WAS MY JOB, AND SAID THAT IF THE CHICKEN WAS HOLDING HER SOUL HOSTAGE, HE WOULD FIND SOME WAY TO BREAK HER OUT, AND THEN HE'D TRY TO TALK HER INTO FINDING AN AFTERLIFE SOMEWHERE TOGETHER THAT WASN'T SO CRUEL AS THE LIVES THEY'D BEEN FORCED TO LEAD IN THIS WORLD. CALVIN: WHAT IF SHE REINCARNATED FIRST? MAX: THAT WOULDN'T HAPPEN IN THE SHORT AMOUNT OF TIME BETWEEN THEIR DEATHS, AND HE MAY HAVE FOUND HIS OWN WAY TO LIBERATE THEM BOTH. I DON'T KNOW FOR CERTAIN.

THAT WAS THE FIRST STEP, IT TURNED OUT, THAT LED TO MY DEATH. AS I TOLD KRALTAR, I WAS WORRIED THAT YOU, CALVIN, WOULD BE CONSIDERED A HERETIC AND END UP DESTROYED



AT EVERY TURN BY THE CHICKEN'S SYSTEM. AND WHAT CONVINCED ME OF IT WAS MY REPLACEMENT CLIENT.

ALSO, LOOKING BACK, I PANICKED. BUT I'D JUST SEEN THE CHICKEN'S FULL SYSTEM IN ACTION. THAT'S WHY I TOLD YOU THAT STORY IN GRIM DETAIL. YOU NEED TO KNOW WHAT



YOU'RE GOING TO BE FIGHTING AGAINST IN FULL, REGARDLESS OF ANY PROPHECY.

ALSO, THE RATES OF DISEASES LIKE ARJENFLORB SYNDROME HAVE GONE WAY DOWN, SO THERE ISN'T MUCH BEGGING!



WHERE'D YOU HEAR THAT THEY WENT DOWN? AND HAVE YOU USED YOUR EYE TO CHECK?



AND HERE I WAS, THINKING THAT SOMETHING WAS GOING RIGHT AND NOT CHECKING IT OUT!



SINCE YOU'VE BEEN LOCKED IN A DUNGEON FOR A LONG TIME, I CAN'T BLAME YOU FOR THAT.



TO GET ENOUGH POWER TO TURN THE OLD TRINITY INTO HIS BUTT-VICEROY, THE CHICKEN DRAINED SOME SPIRITUAL ENERGY FROM THIS REALITY TO KEEP IT OUT OF THE TRINITY'S HANDS. NOT ENOUGH TO



BREAK IT LIKE BRIAN'S ORIGINAL REALITY, BUT ENOUGH TO BREAK THE TIMELINE HERE. SOME OF THE FUTURE BECAME THE PRESENT.



WHAT, WAS SUSIE THE ONE?

NO, BUT I HAD ANOTHER CLIENT WHO ENDED UP IN THE SAME FACILITY THAT MY FORMER CLIENT'S MATE DID.



I WAS LEERY ENOUGH. I WAS ALSO FEELING A BIT GUILTY ABOUT HOW I WAS FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO BE MAGICALLY HEALED FROM A POTENTIALLY FATAL WOUND JUST BECAUSE I'D MADE THE RIGHT FRIENDS, WHILE THESE PEOPLE HAD NO SUCH LUCK.



MAX: BUT A FEW SESSIONS IN, MY NEW CLIENT MENTIONED A KID BEING ADMITTED, WHICH I THOUGHT WAS ODD. IMAGINE MY SURPRISE WHEN I FOUND OUT IT WAS SUSIE, WHOM I'D SEEN SOME OF THE LAST TIME I VISITED CALVIN AND THE REST OF MY BROTHER'S FAMILY. AND SHE HAD ARJENFLORB SYNDROME, TOO! SUSIE: MAX FIGURED THAT IF THE CHICKEN HAD TARGETED ME WITH ARJENFLORB SYNDROME, WITH MY HERETIC SISTER, YOU, CALVIN, WOULD BE NEXT FOR BEING A POTENTIAL HERETIC YOURSELF. MAX: IT GOT TO THE POINT I COULDN'T SLEEP. I HAD TO SEE FOR MYSELF HOW CALVIN WAS DOING, REGARDLESS OF MY BROTHER'S LETTERS. I HAD A PLAN.

HOW COULD PEOPLE HAVE LET THINGS GET SO BAD? AND WITH THE CHICKEN GONE, WHO'S GOING TO MAKE SURE HIS REPLACEMENT ISN'T THE SAME?



IN ORDER: I DON'T KNOW, AND THE PLE-ROMA COUNCIL HAS SOME PLANS TO AVOID IT, SINCE MOST OF THE MEMBERS HAVE BEEN OPPRESSED BY THE CHICKEN AND/OR HIS AGENTS THEMSELVES.



AT LEAST THINGS IMPROVED AFTER THE BIG FOUR TURNED ON THE CHICKEN! DROPPING THE "TREATING PATIENTS" ACT AND OPENLY KILLING THEM FOR MONEY AT LEAST LED TO THE NEW SYSTEM WHERE BEGGING THE CHICKEN FOR HELP CAN GET HIM TO SHOW MERCY! NOT THAT IT'S GOOD, BUT IT'S A NET IMPROVEMENT FOR THOSE WHO NEED MERCY!



ALL THE REPORTED STATISTICS I COULD FIND SAY THE RATES STARTED GOING DOWN AFTER QUADPOOP DAY HAPPENED AND WAS MADE A NATIONAL HOLIDAY. I SHOULD CHECK... AAAAAH!



LEAVING ASIDE THE HOLIDAY COMMEMORATING THE BIG FOUR'S BEING TURNED INTO POOP GHOSTS FOR THEIR CRIMES, WHICH MANY CAN APPRECIATE, YOU NOW SEE THAT THE CRIMES NEVER STOPPED? THAT THEY WERE JUST COVERED UP BETTER?



ARJENFLORB SYNDROME, ASTHMA, DIABETES, CEREBRAL PALSY... ALL DISEASES THAT SIGNIFICANTLY CUT INTO PEOPLE'S ABILITY TO WORK! AND PEOPLE WITH THEM ARE NOW CALLED "USELESS EATERS" AND MASS-KILLED IN SECRET, EXCEPT FOR A FEW TOKEN CASES OF EACH! IS THERE NO END TO ALL THE SPILLED BLOOD?!



IF HE WANTS EVERYONE TO WORK SO BADLY, WHY DOESN'T HE HELP TREAT THOSE DISEASES, OR AT LEAST KEEP THEM UNDER CONTROL? THEY COULD WORK WITH THE RIGHT HELP! WHY KILL THEM INSTEAD?



TIME SPENT HAVING THOSE CONDITIONS TREATED OR KEPT UNDER CONTROL IS TIME NOT SPENT WORKING. THE CHICKEN OBJECTED TO HIS UNDERLINGS' MASS MURDER UNTIL HE ENGAGED IN IT HIMSELF AFTER HE KILLED THEM. THEN HE CHANGED HIS MIND. ONE OF OUR ANCIENT BUILDERS HAD CEREBRAL PALSY, SO THE ODDS OF MY PEOPLE'S BEING BUILT IN YOUR REALITY ARE NOW NEGLIGIBLE.



THERE'S ALSO GENETIC ENGINEERING THAT COULD TREAT MANY OF THEM, BUT THE CHICKEN PREFERS TO ONLY USE IT ON PEOPLE HE DEEMS WORTHY.



WHEN WE CHANGED FROM THE OLD TRINITY TO THE CHICKEN, THAT WAS ONE OF MANY THINGS I SUDDENLY KNEW ABOUT WHEN I DIDN'T BEFORE! WHY IS THAT?



MAX: THERE WAS OTHER DAMAGE THAT THE ONI TIME-WAR-DENS WERE ABLE TO FIX, BUT THAT'S ANOTHER REASON WHY THE ONI HATE THE CHICKEN SO MUCH. TIFFANY RANTED ABOUT IT ONCE. CALVIN: THAT EXPLAINS SO MUCH!

THIS EASY-LISTENING MUZAK REALLY OFFENDS MOM AND DAD! WAIT, WHY AM I NOT PLAYING SPEED-CORE DUB-STEP MUSIC INSTEAD?



RIGHT. THE FLYING SPAGHETTI MONSTER, THE KIND OF ADVANCED GENETIC ENGINEERING THAT CAN FIX SO MANY MORE MEDICAL PROBLEMS (IF YOU CAN AFFORD IT), SO MANY NEW MUSIC GENRES... THEY'RE ALL FROM YEARS IN THE FUTURE!



ADD IN THE STUFF FROM OTHER REALITIES WHERE THINGS ARE DIFFERENT ENOUGH, AND... I PREFER TO CALL IT INFINITE POSSIBILITIES, THOUGH SOME CALL IT A MUD-DLED MESS. IT HELPS US HERE.



MAX: I NEEDED KRALTAR'S HELP WITH MY PLAN, SINCE FTL TRAVEL WAS THE ONLY WAY TO GET TO YOU FAST ENOUGH.

SO YOU WANT TO USE THE SHIP ON AN UNOFFICIAL MISSION?

I KNOW IT SOUNDS BAD...



NEEDS MUST AS THE CHICKEN DRIVES. I UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF SAVING FAMILY WHEN IT IS REQUIRED, AS OPPOSED TO MERELY MAKING A SOCIAL CALL.

...THANK YOU.



I WILL GO WITH YOU. YOU HAVE BECOME A SKILLED PILOT, BUT TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE, AND WE HAVE DOWNTIME, SINCE THE LAST OFFICIAL SIDE MISSION WAS... A BUST?

YES, THAT'S THE RIGHT PHRASING. WHAT WENT WRONG?



IT TURNS OUT THAT "BRILLIANCE," THE ANTI-HOLY WEAPON, IS NOT AS EASILY ACCESSIBLE AS WE THOUGHT, AND THE GOD BEHIND IT REFUSES TO HELP US.

WHAT WAS HIS NAME? EAR ED?



IT IS YREDELEMNUL, AND THE GOD HAS NO GENDER.

RIGHT, LIKE SKIRRA. GODS AREN'T LIMITED BY THAT, ESPECIALLY THOSE FROM OTHER REALITIES.

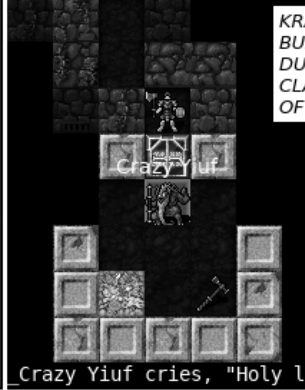


THAT IS THE FIRST PROBLEM. YALDA-BAAWK MAY CALL HIMSELF HOLY, BUT IS IT SO? AND OTHER REALITIES MAY DEFINE HOLINESS DIFFERENTLY.

SO THE WEAPON MIGHT NOT WORK.



KRALTAR: IT'S ALSO BURIED DEEP IN A DUNGEON THAT HAS CLAIMED THE LIVES OF FAR TOO MANY.



Crazy Yiuf cries, "Holy lumber chicken!"

WHICH IS THE SECOND PROBLEM: TOO MUCH RISK. I GET IT. TOO BAD IT DIDN'T PAN OUT.



SPEAKING OF DUNGEONS, YOU SAID YOUR BROTHER AND HIS FAMILY LIVE PRACTICALLY ON TOP OF THE CHICKEN'S DUNGEON, YES?

YES.



I'LL MAKE SURE THAT STEALTH MODE IS AT FULL POWER, THEN. IT WILL TAKE TIME TO CHARGE. CAN YOU HOLD OUT FOR NINE DAYS?

THAT'S FINE.



IT WILL ALSO TAKE THAT LONG TO INFORM THE OTHERS OF MY ABSENCE. THIS TRIP MAY ALSO BE RELATED TO THE PROPHECY, I THINK. POSSIBLY! I HOPE MY BROTHER BEHAVES.



I'D CALL HIM "ARPHAXAD THE KIN-SLAYER" NOW, IF THAT NAME WASN'T TOTALLY METAL!

HUH!

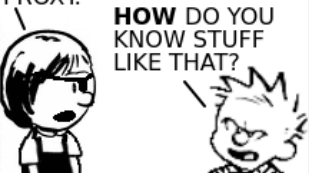


HE CALLED UPON THE CHICKEN TO TURN MOM INTO A BUTT-PERSON, SINCE SHE WAS RELUCTANT TO HAVE ME THROWN IN THE DUNGEON! WHAT DOES THAT ALSO MAKE HIM?



LET'S SEE... ONE OF THE CHICKEN GOD'S BUTT-RELATED TITLES IS THE ULTIMATE CALLIPYGIAN... THAT'S GREEK, SO CHICKEN-TRANSFORMING-BUTT IN GREEK ROOTS IS... POULTOMORPHOPYGIAN. HE'S ONE OF THOSE BY PROXY.

HOW DO YOU KNOW STUFF LIKE THAT?



I READ WHEN I GET BORED, AND I'VE DONE MORE OF IT SINCE I WAS THROWN IN THE DUNGEON. BESIDES, FOCUSING ON STUFF LIKE THIS IS A DISTRACTION FROM THE STUFF WE JUST LEARNED FROM MAX.



DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING COOLER? LIKE SOMETHING ELSE THAT WOULD OFFEND THE CHICKEN?

HEXADECIMAL IS BASE SIXTEEN, BUT IT'S A MIX OF LATIN AND GREEK. FULL LATIN WOULD MAKE IT SEXADECIMAL.



IT IS SIMILAR TO BASE THIRTY-SIX, WHICH IS CALLED HEXATRIGESIMAL BY SOME IN YOUR REALITY WHO KNOW OF IT, AND WHICH ALSO MIXES LATIN AND GREEK. A BAD PUN ABOUT BASE SIXTEEN THAT SOME OF MY PEOPLE MAKE IS "3740042371887387303."

YOUR "EVIL" PROCESSOR, RIGHT. YOU CAN PUN TOO?



I WONDER HOW LONG IT TOOK YOU TO LEARN ROBOT-SPEAK, SINCE IT PROBABLY INVOLVES A LOT OF MATH.

A WHILE, BUT WE HAD A LOT OF TIME ON OUR HANDS.



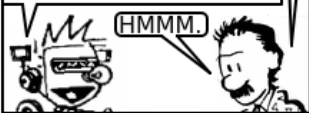
MAX: AND BRIAN IS A GOOD TEACHER, ESPECIALLY WHEN GIVEN ENOUGH TIME.

WHAT DOES "2432449536195120293-1923003025819763950-3885865352531129577" SAY IN MY LANGUAGE?

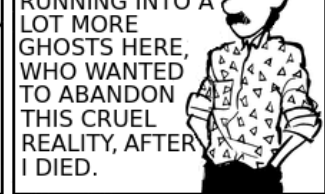
I HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA WHAT IT SAYS AT ALL!

THAT IS HILARIOUS, AND WHEN YOU LEARN IT, YOU WILL UNDERSTAND WHY!

HMMM.



AND I ALSO HAD TO DISTRACT MYSELF FROM BLOODY NEWS. THE WAY I FOUND OUT ABOUT THE CHICKEN'S CONTINUING MASS MURDER AFTER HE TOOK DOWN THE BIG FOUR WAS RUNNING INTO A LOT MORE GHOSTS HERE, WHO WANTED TO ABANDON THIS CRUEL REALITY, AFTER I DIED.



BUT I'M GETTING AHEAD OF MYSELF AGAIN. IN THE NINE DAYS I HAD TO WAIT, I RAN INTO SUSIE'S PARENTS WHEN I TOOK MY NEW CLIENT TO THE FACILITY, AND THEY RECOGNIZED ME.



THEY MENTIONED OFFHAND THAT ALL THEIR ATTEMPTS TO GET THE CHICKEN TO SPARE AT LEAST ONE OF THEIR DAUGHTERS WERE FOR NAUGHT.

IT'S NOT AN IMPROMPTU VISIT. HE REALLY DISLIKES THOSE, AND IT WOULD BE MORE SUSPICIOUS TO MAKE ONE. I SENT HIM A LETTER A FEW DAYS AGO.

YOU KNOW HIM BEST. I'LL STILL PUT ON MY HUMAN DISGUISE NOW, BEFORE YOU TURN ON FTL.



SPATIAL MATRIX HAS STABILIZED. DISENGAGING FTL, ENTERING HOVER MODE.

GOOD!



THE TELESCANNER DETECTS NO LIVING BEINGS WITH HOSTILE INTENT. WE SHOULD BE SAFE.

MOVING TO THE EDGE OF THE RAVINE ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE HOUSE.



MAX, **DO NOT** MOVE. THE SHIP HAS TAKEN DAMAGE, AND I WILL MAKE AN EMERGENCY LANDING WITH THE AUTOMATIC CONTROLS. THE MEDICAL ANALYZER WILL TELL ME HOW BADLY YOU'RE INJURED.

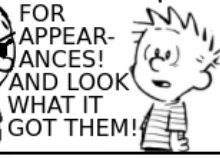
UUHH...

FORGET MY DISGUISE. WE HAVE LOST THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE.

AND **THAT'S** HOW HE FIRST FOUND OUT I EXISTED! THAT **ONE** CONVERSATION!

EXACTLY! THEY CARED ONLY FOR APPEARANCES!

AND NOW THEY'VE LOST BOTH OF YOU!



THE DAY BEFORE THE TRIP, THERE WAS TALK THAT SUSIE'D TAKEN A TURN FOR THE WORSE. SHE WAS JUST A KID, AFTER ALL. IT WORRIED ME MORE, BUT I HELD UP.



IT WASN'T JUST TALK, EITHER. I LASTED A WEEK.

MAX: WHICH MEANS SHE LIVED LONGER THAN I DID, BY ABOUT SIX DAYS. THE TRIP STARTED OUT AS EXPECTED.

LIFTOFF ACHIEVED. FULL STEALTH MODE ENGAGED.

YOU'RE CERTAIN YOUR BROTHER CAN HANDLE AN IMPROMPTU VISIT?



MAX: AND WE WERE OFF!

BWEGZORRRM!



ADJUSTING... HOW DO I LOOK?

LIKE ONE OF CALVIN'S SCHOOL-TEACHERS.



SINCE I'M TRYING TO EVOKE CONCERN INSTEAD OF FEAR, THAT IS GOOD, YES?

I HOPE THIS WORKS. EN-GAGING FTL...



TO DOUBLE-CHECK THE PLAN: I AM IN DISGUISE FOR THOSE WHO FOLLOW THE CHICKEN, BUT MAY NOT BE HIS AGENTS.



AND FOR ANY HERETICS. IF CHICKEN AGENTS SCREAM ABOUT A LIZARD-PERSON **HERE...**



FOR OUR PURPOSES, IT WILL. UNLESS SOMETHING HAPPENS THAT IS BEYOND ALL EXPECTATION.

I'D ACCUSE YOU OF JINXING THINGS, BUT I'VE HAD TO REDEFINE EXPECTATION **A LOT** SINCE MEETING YOUR KIND.



REMINDE ME AGAIN, **WHY** DOES YOUR BROTHER LIVE NEAR BOTH A RAVINE AND A DUNGEON? THE LATTER FITS HIS FANATICISM, BUT THE FORMER?



THE RAVINE WAS THERE?

IT'S BROAD DAYLIGHT ON A SATURDAY. YOUR NEPHEW SHOULD BE HOME, YES?



I DON'T SEE HIM ANYWHERE. THAT IS ODD.

SMOO! FLARK! SMOOFLARK!

BROTHER MAX DETECTED. DNA AND TELEPATHIC SCANS FAILED PURITY TEST. PURIFYING NOW.



MAX: I'D NEVER HEARD KRALTAR SWEAR BEFORE, OR SINCE.

NO ONE HAS A CEL-BIRD PURIFIER ANYMORE! ESPECIALLY OUTSIDE THE MILITARY! IT'S A WAR CRIME TO USE ONE!



RECORDED MESSAGE BEGINS:

"MAX, IF YOU'RE HEARING THIS, YOU'VE CORRUPTED YOURSELF AND TRIED TO SPREAD THAT CORRUPTION TO MY SON, WHICH I WILL NOT PERMIT. I WARNED YOU. THESE ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR ACTIONS." MESSAGE ENDS.



HOW MANY BLEEDING HOLES DO I HAVE NOW?!

CENSORED. YOU DON'T WANT TO SEE THESE.

IT WAS AT MAXIMUM SETTING! YOUR WOUNDS ARE BEING HELD OPEN WITH CELESTIAL POWER! I COULD COUNTERACT IT AND PATCH THEM UP UNTIL WE COULD REACH A REAL HEALER, BUT THERE ARE SO MANY THAT THERE'S NO TIME! YOUR BROTHER'S BOON FROM THE CHICKEN



HAS, UNFORTUNATELY, SUCCEEDED ALL TOO WELL!

NO TIME? THE FTL
COULD TAKE US
THERE INSTANTLY!

THE PURIFIER'S BEAM
WENT THROUGH THE
ENGINE COMPART-
MENT. IT'S TOO RISKY.
THE CHICKEN HAS
LIKELY BEEN
ALERTED,
TOO.

SO... WHAT
NOW?



YOU'LL BLEED OUT IN A
MATTER OF MINUTES,
UNLESS THE CHICKEN OR
HIS AGENTS GET HERE
FASTER. THEY'LL ENSURE
WE'RE BOTH DEAD, AND
THE CHICKEN
WILL TURN US
BOTH INTO
SILENCED
GHOSTS OF
SOME TYPE. MOST
LIKELY POOP, HIS
FAVORITE.



WAIT... DID THE MAGUS'
DIPLOMATIC OVERTURES
TO THE DUNGEON GOB-
LINS WORK OUT?
ONLY ENOUGH TO
LEARN THAT NONE
OF THEM WILLINGLY
SERVE THE
CHICKEN.
THEY MIGHT
HELP YOU,
THEN!



KLAKRONGGG!

THE SHIP HAS
JUST CRASH-
LANDED, INTO
WHAT IS AP-
ARENTLY AN
UNDERGROUND
PART OF THE
DUNGEON.
I SEE GOBLINS.
THEY SURROUND
THE SHIP NOW.



GOOD! AS
FOR ME...

ONLY THE CHICKEN CAN
MAKE SILENCED GHOSTS,
AND ONLY IN PERSON?

ALL OUR INTELLIGENCE
SAYS SO. IT LIMITS HIS
POWER, MUCH LIKE
HOW HE CAN ONLY
TURN MORTALS INTO
BUTT-PEOPLE
WITHOUT
HELP.

THEN I KNOW
WHAT TO DO.



EAT ME.

EAT ME, AND
HIDE UNTIL
YOU CAN
POOP ME OUT.
YOU'RE A CAR-
NIVORE, AND
WE KNOW
EACH OTHER
WELL ENOUGH.

WHAT?!



THE LUMBERCHICKEN
CAN'T SILENCE MY GHOST
IF I'M **YOUR** POOP IN-
STEAD OF HIS. AND IF I'M
NOT SILENCED, I CAN
STILL HELP WITH BOTH
MY NEPHEW AND THE
PROPHECY, EVEN
THOUGH I'M DEAD.



TRUST ME.

...EVEN THOUGH IT
PAINS ME VERY
MUCH, IF THAT IS
YOUR FINAL WISH, I
WILL DO IT. DO YOU
HAVE ANY SPIRITUAL
NEEDS BEFORE I
PROCEED?

I'LL SORT THOSE
OUT WHEN I
GET TO THE
OTHER SIDE.
SAVE ME AND
MAKE
ME YOUR
POOP.



WHEN I FIRST ARRIVED IN
THE DUNGEON, THE CHICK-
EN BRAGGED ABOUT TURN-
ING ALL MONOTHEISMS IN-
TO POOP, BUT THEN HE
SAID YOU WERE ANOTHER'S
POOP. SO HE WAS TELLING
THE TRUTH?

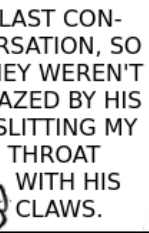


THAT EXPLAINS DAD'S
WEIRD BEHAVIOR IN THE
SUPERMARKET THAT ONE
TIME! HE COVERED UP THE
TABLOID HEADLINE IN THE
AISLE AND SAID IT WAS SO
INAPPROPRIATE THAT I
SHOULDN'T EVEN LOOK AT
IT, MUCH LESS READ IT!

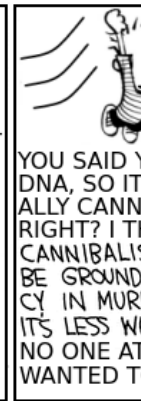


THERE'S ONE THING I DON'T
UNDERSTAND. IF I'M PART
OF THE PROPHECY, THEN
MY GETTING ARJENFLORB
SYNDROME AND ENDING
UP IN THE CHICKEN'S MASS-
MURDER-FOR-PROFIT SYS-
TEM WON'T HAPPEN. NOT
THAT I DON'T APPRECIATE
YOUR CONCERN FOR ME,
BUT WHAT'S THE DEAL?

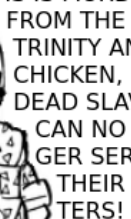
YES. THE SHIP'S STEALTH
MODE WAS OFF DUE TO
DAMAGE, WHICH IS HOW
THE GOBLINS KNEW WE
WERE THERE. THEY OVER-
HEARD KRALTAR'S AND
MY LAST CON-
VERSATION, SO
THEY WEREN'T
FAZED BY HIS
SLITTING MY
THROAT
WITH HIS
CLAWS.



YOU SAID YOU HAD HIS
DNA, SO IT WAS BASIC-
ALLY CANNIBALISM,
RIGHT? I THINK THAT
CANNIBALISM OUGHT TO
BE GROUNDS FOR LENIEN-
CY IN MURDERS, SINCE
IT'S LESS WASTEFUL, BUT
NO ONE AT SCHOOL
WANTED TO DEBATE IT!



IT MAY HAVE BEEN CANNI-
BALISM, BUT IT WASN'T
MURDER. I WANTED TO DIE
BEFORE MY BROTHER'S
PLAN FOR ME WORKED. THE
IDEA THAT DYING ON YOUR
OWN TERMS IS MURDER IS
FROM THE OLD
TRINITY AND THE
CHICKEN, SINCE
DEAD SLAVES
CAN NO LONG-
ER SERVE
THEIR MAS-
TERS!



LET ME GUESS...
"MAN HAS UFO
AFFAIR WITH EL-
DERLY SCHOOL-
TEACHER WHO
TURNS OUT TO
BE SHAPESHIF-
TING LI-
ZARD?"



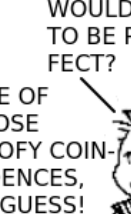
YEP. I LOOKED
IT UP LATER.



THE ONLY CLEAR
PICTURE WAS OF
MISS WORM-
WOOD! ANYONE
WHO BROUGHT IT
UP IN CLASS GOT
SENT TO THE
PRINCIPAL!



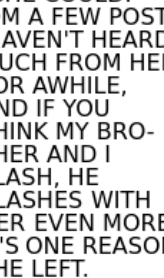
BUT HOW
DID A PHOTO-
GRAPHER GET
THOSE PIC-
TURES AT ALL,
GIVEN THEIR
TIMING
WOULD HAVE
TO BE PER-
FECT?



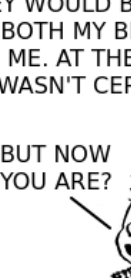
CONSIDERING MY BRO-
THER NEVER TOLD YOU
HIS REAL NAME, DID HE
TELL YOU ABOUT OUR SIS-
TER WALBURGA?



THAT'S A "NO," THEN.
SHE WAS THE YOUNGEST
OF US, AND WENT OFF
TO SEE THE WORLD AS
SOON AS SHE COULD.
ASIDE FROM A FEW POST-
CARDS, I HAVEN'T HEARD
MUCH FROM HER
FOR AWHILE,
AND IF YOU
THINK MY BRO-
THER AND I
CLASH, HE
CLASHES WITH
HER EVEN MORE.
IT'S ONE REASON
SHE LEFT.



THE POINT IS, SHE MAY
HAVE HAD A KID WHO
COULD HAVE TAKEN YOUR
PART IN THE PROPHECY,
SINCE THEY WOULD BE RE-
LATED TO BOTH MY BRO-
THER AND ME. AT THE TIME,
I WASN'T CERTAIN.



BUT NOW
YOU ARE?



I DIDN'T STAY AROUND LONG AFTER BECOMING A GHOST, JUST IN CASE THE CHICKEN COULD DO SOMETHING ELSE TO ME, AND BECAUSE MY LIBERATION MOVED ME TO THE FRONT OF THE LINE FOR SPIRITUAL PROCESSING. TIFFANY ANSWERED A FEW OF MY QUESTIONS WHEN I FIRST ARRIVED, AND THAT CLEARED THINGS UP.



MY BROTHER PROBABLY SET UP THAT PURIFIER TO BLAST HER, TOO, IF SHE CAME AROUND. AND WHO WOULD EXPECT TERROR WEAPON TECHNOLOGY FROM CELESTIAL BIRD PEOPLE TO BE IN A NORMAL SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD? AND LOUIS WAIN, THE ARTIST, COULD APPARENTLY SEE ELDRITCH HORRORS IN OTHER REALITIES SOMEHOW.



EXACTLY. THEY BOTH WANTED TO BE DICTATORS, EVEN THOUGH ONE CLAIMED TO HAVE A YES-CHICKEN WHILE THE OTHER DIDN'T. BUT THAT WASN'T ENOUGH: MELVILLE STARTED LOOKING INTO PSYCHOLOGY TO DIFFERENTIATE HIMSELF FROM YOUR DAD.



HOW, IF THEY'RE SO MUCH ALIKE?

ALSO, THE TERM "INSANE" IS ONLY USED BY LAWYERS, NOT PSYCHOLOGISTS. THE POINT IS THAT THE "RELIGION IS A MENTAL ILLNESS" ATHEISTS ARE JUST THE MIRROR OF THE CHICKEN'S "ANY VIEW OTHER THAN MINE IS A MENTAL ILLNESS." THEY TWIST RATIONALITY THE SAME WAY. "WORK HARD AND YOU'LL MAKE IT" IS AN IRRATIONAL BELIEF, FOR EXAMPLE. IT ONLY GUARANTEES YOU'LL BE IGNORED OR GIVEN MORE WORK. THAT WAS WHEN I FIRST MET HER, AND SHE'S BASICALLY THE SAME WAY NOW. SCARY (SINCE ONI ARE DEMONS, AFTER ALL), BUT FAIR WHEN SHE NEEDS TO BE. I WAS USHERED INTO THE "SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES" ROOM WITH A BUNCH OF OTHER NEW GHOSTS. AND IT WAS ONE **BIG** ROOM, LET ME TELL YOU!



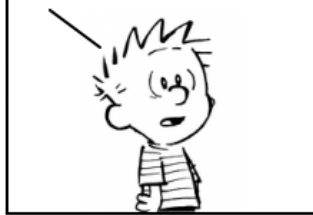
MAX: WALBURGA HAD ESCAPED TO ANOTHER REALITY WITH HUMANS IN IT, SHE'D HAD A FAMILY THERE, AND SHE HAD NO PLANS TO RETURN. SHE WAS DOING SOME ELDRITCH THINGS THERE INVOLVING CATS. TIFFANY'S COUNTERPART IN THAT REALITY KNEW WHY.

MY AUNT WALBURGA USED TO SAY THE STARS HELD EVIL BEINGS WHO WATCH OVER US AND BRING US TERMINAL CORRUPTION.

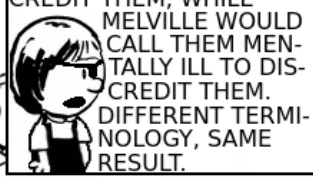
I'M SORRY, JON. I AM TERMINAL CORRUPTION.



DAD SAID ONCE THAT A LOT OF GREAT ARTISTS WERE INSANE. MAYBE THEIR ABILITY TO SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY JUST MADE THEM SEEM THAT WAY?



ONLY LABELS. MELVILLE GOT A PSYCHOLOGY DEGREE, BUT HE ONLY LEARNED HOW TO MANIPULATE PEOPLE AND REGURGITATED EVERYTHING ELSE TO PASS THE TESTS. YOUR DAD WOULD CALL PEOPLE HERETICS TO DISCREDIT THEM, WHILE MELVILLE WOULD CALL THEM MENTALLY ILL TO DISCREDIT THEM. DIFFERENT TERMINOLOGY, SAME RESULT.



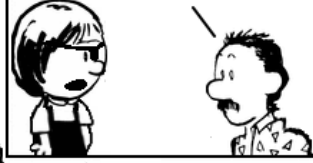
BUT TO GET BACK ON TOPIC, GOOD THING THE MELVILLE TIMELINE WON'T BE COMING TO PASS.

ARE YOU SURE A PORTAL LEADING TO THAT TIMELINE WON'T SHOW UP SOMEWHERE?



WERE THEY ALL LIBERATED LIKE YOU? OR WERE THERE OTHERS, SINCE IT WASN'T THE "LIBERATED" ROOM?

JUDGING FROM THE TAGS WE HAD TO WEAR, THERE WERE A LOT OF DIFFERENT TYPES!



BE CAREFUL THROWING AROUND TERMS LIKE "INSANE" WHEN YOU'RE NOT QUALIFIED TO DO SO. MELVILLE DID THAT, AND YOU DON'T WANT TO FOLLOW IN HIS FOOTSTEPS AT ALL.

MY ALTERNATE-FUTURE YOUNGER BROTHER?



SOUNDS LIKE THE SO-CALLED DOCTORS. A DEGREE THAT'S JUST A MAGIC AUTHORITY SYMBOL, SO EVERYONE HAS TO BELIEVE WHATEVER YOU SAY OR WRITE ON PAPERWORK, WHETHER IT'S TRUE OR NOT, AND WHETHER YOU ACTUALLY KNOW ANYTHING OR NOT.

PRETTY MUCH!

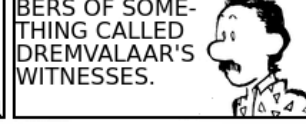


VERY SURE. ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS I LEARNED AFTER I DIED WAS THAT MORE SIMILAR REALITIES ARE LESS LIKELY TO HAVE PORTALS BETWEEN THEM.

HOW'D YOU LEARN THAT?



SOME LIBERATED BY GNOSIS MY WAY OR ANOTHER WAY, SOME LIBERATED BY BEING PUT IN A DEFECTIVE ENOUGH FALSE FORM THAT THEY ESCAPED IT BY LUCK, SOME ATHEISTS WHO JUST LIVED THEIR LIVES AND LET THE GODS TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES, AND A FEW MEMBERS OF SOMETHING CALLED DREMVALAAR'S WITNESSES.



APPARENTLY, THERE WAS AN EVIL DEMIURGE RULING THERE, TOO, AND IT HAD A WEAKNESS TO CATS. SHE USED ELDRITCH POWERS TO TAKE IT DOWN FOR GOOD.



I WONDER IF I'LL HAVE TO DO THAT FOR **THIS** REALITY!



YES. HIS CONFLICT WITH YOUR DAD STARTED WITH NOT WANTING TO SERVE ANY EVIL GODS, WHICH IS FINE. BUT HE EXTENDED IT TO NOT SERVING ANY GODS BECAUSE HE WANTED TO GIVE ORDERS INSTEAD OF TAKE THEM. **DIRECTLY.**

AS OPPOSED TO DAD, WHO DOES THAT WHENEVER THE CHICKEN ISN'T LOOKING CLOSELY ENOUGH.

ANYWAY, IT WAS A RARE 0% CHANCE THAT MELVILLE ACTUALLY BECAME A PSYCHOLOGIST, SO HIS DEGREE FELL OUT OF DATE, NO ONE TOOK HIM AS AN AUTHORITY ON ANYTHING, AND HE FINALLY TOOK HIS FRUSTRATIONS OUT ON YOUR DAD. **THAT** LED TO THEM BOTH KILLING EACH OTHER.



SOUNDS ABOUT RIGHT.

MAX: TIFFANY MENTIONED IT WHEN SHE PROCESSED ME.

98% OF YOU IS OF ONE REALITY, AND 2% OF YOU IS OF ANOTHER. YOU GO TO WHAT YOU ARE A MAJORITY OF. AS FOR YOUR SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, I WILL SEE!



MAX: WE WERE THERE A LONG TIME, SO WE CHATTED WHILE EVERYONE WAS DEALT WITH ONE BY ONE. THE GODS OF THE PLEROMA COUNCIL MOSTLY HAVE NO QUARREL WITH THOSE KINDS OF ATHEISTS, AS LONG AS THEY DON'T ENGAGE IN CHICKEN-THOUGHT BY TYING GODS' WORTHINESS TO THEIR WILLINGNESS TO OBEY ORDERS. SOME LIBERATED ONES TOLD ME OF THE VOWS THEY'D TAKEN. ONE SAID HE'D COME BACK IF THE CHICKEN BANNED SINGAPORE CHOW MAI FUN, AND ANOTHER SAID SHE'D COME BACK IF THE CHICKEN BANNED PUTTING RED BEAN PASTE IN OATMEAL. SO MANY FOOD RULES.



THE DREMVALAAR'S WITNESSES WERE TROUBLE. ONE OF THEM STARTED DOING A SERMON RIGHT THERE IN THE ROOM, AND THAT'S HOW THE TROUBLE BEGAN. DREMVALAAR WAS APPARENTLY A MONOTHEISTIC GOD OF ATHEISM: THEY WERE THE ONE TRUE GOD, AND WORSHIPPERS HAD TO HAVE PERFECT FAITH THAT THEY DIDN'T EXIST.



THAT MAKES NO SENSE AT ALL! IT MAKES EVEN **LESS** SENSE WHEN YOU KNOW ABOUT THEIR ONE SECTARIAN SPLIT!

FOLLOWERS OF A NONEXISTENT GOD ARE SECTARIAN?!

DREMVALAAR VERSUS POOP-DREMVALAAR!



IT WAS PARTIALLY THE CHICKEN'S FAULT. THE SPLIT WAS OVER WHETHER, WHEN THE CHICKEN ATE ALL THE MONOTHEISTIC GODS AND TURNED THEM INTO POOP, HE ALSO TURNED DREMVALAAR INTO POOP. THE REFORMED DREMVALAAR'S WITNESSES BELIEVED THE CHICKEN COULD DO IT, WHILE THE ORIGINALISTS DIDN'T.



CALVIN: CAN AN OMNIPOTENT CHICKEN GOD TURN A GOD WHO DOESN'T EXIST INTO POOP? AND IF THE NONEXISTENT GOD IS THE ONE TRUE GOD, WHY WOULD HE ALLOW IT?
MAX: IT WAS A TEST OF THE REFORMED ONES' FAITH, OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT. THE TWO GROUPS GOT INTO A BRAWL, AND AN ONI SECURITY GUARD FINALLY SHOWED UP, MAGICALLY PICKED THEM ALL UP, AND TOLD THEM HE WAS GOING TO SHOVE THEM ALL UP DREMVALAAR'S NONEXISTENT BUTTHOLE OF SCHRÖDINGER'S POOP IF THEY DIDN'T KNOCK IT OFF!
SARANNA: BUTTHOLE OF SCHRÖDINGER'S POOP? WHAT'S THAT?
MAX: A BUTTHOLE THAT MAY OR MAY NOT BE MADE OUT OF POOP. LONG STORY.

ANYWAY, AS THE GUARD WAS LEAVING, ONE OF THE D.W.'S MADE A CRACK ABOUT HOW DREMVALAAR WAS A FALSE GOD WHO WAS DEAD AND IN HELL, BUT POOP-DREMVALAAR WAS THE TRUE GOD WHO RULED FOREVER. SO THE GUARD TURNED AROUND, MAGICALLY PICKED THEM ALL UP AGAIN, AND TOLD THEM THEY'D BE MEETING DREMVALAAR **PERSONALLY**. THEN HE LEFT WITH THEM.



SO THE LESSON IS, STAY AWAY FROM D.W.'S, AND DON'T TICK OFF ONI SECURITY GUARDS WHEN YOU'RE DEAD?

RIGHT, BUT LET ME GET TO THE IMPORTANT PART.



MY PROCESSING WENT WELL. MY BEING PART OF A PROPHECY MEANT THAT CERTAIN SPIRITUAL LEADERS WITH VESTED INTERESTS IN THAT PROPHECY COULD REQUEST ACCESS TO ME. THAT WAS HOW I FIRST MET SHAMAN GHEFZARAL OF THE DUNGEON GOBLINS.



DID HE HAVE TO SCRY YOU THROUGH FLAMES? I KNOW THAT'S SOMETHING HE DOES, ALTHOUGH I'VE ONLY SEEN HIM DO IT ONCE. IT'S NOT OFTEN SHOWN TO NON-CLERICS.

I THINK SO! THERE WAS A YELLOWISH-ORANGE GLOW AROUND HIM WHEN WE FIRST SPOKE!



HE'D HAD A VISION FROM TIFFANY ABOUT THE PROPHECY AND WHO WAS INVOLVED IN IT, AND SHE POINTED HIM TO ME. WE MADE A DEAL TO KEEP IN CONTACT. I ASKED HIM IF HE KNEW WHAT HAPPENED TO KRALTAR, BUT HE SAID THAT WAS A MATTER OF GOBLIN SECURITY AND REFUSED TO ELABORATE. I STILL WONDER WHAT HE MEANT.



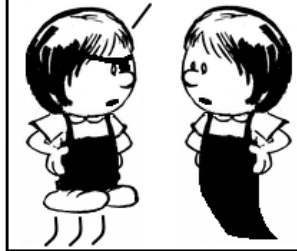
AND SPEAKING OF WHAT HAPPENED TO PEOPLE, I'VE PUT OFF YOUR REUNION WITH YOUR SISTER LONG ENOUGH.

OKAY, SINCE I THINK I'M PREPARED FOR IT BY NOW!



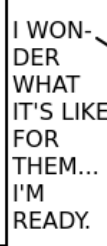
HOLD ON TO ME. EVEN WHEN YOU'RE PREPARED, IT'S A LOT TO TAKE IN.

READY WHEN YOU ARE!



THERE ARE DIMENSIONS WHERE EVERYONE IN A SPECIES CAN DO THIS, NOT JUST IDENTICAL TWINS. IT'S CALLED DREAMFASTING IN THOSE PLACES.

I WONDER WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR THEM... I'M READY.



INSIDE A SHARED MINDSCAPE...

WHOA! ABSORBING TEN YEARS' WORTH OF MEMORIES AT ONCE IS A LOT! ALTHOUGH, GIVEN WHAT MAX JUST SAID ABOUT THE TIMELINE'S HAVING TO BE FIXED... IS THAT WHY WE'RE STILL KIDS INSTEAD OF TEENAGERS RIGHT NOW?



YES. BUT SINCE I'M A GHOST, I ALSO DON'T AGE ANYMORE UNLESS I WANT TO, AND I DON'T WANT TO YET. THE EXACT CONVERSATION I HAD WITH MAX SHOULD BE ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO. WE WERE BOTH GHOSTS THEN, WE WERE TALKING ABOUT HOW SOME OF THE HELLS WORKED, HE MENTIONED A HELL OF UNAGING, AND THAT WAS HOW IT CAME UP.

SARANNA-VISION: INTERESTING. I SENSE THAT SUSIE HAS DEEPER QUESTIONS. I WILL ANSWER THEM TO THE BEST OF MY ABILITY, SINCE THEY INVOLVE BOTH SUSIE AND YOU.

I WONDER, WAS ONE OF THE DREAMS I HAD ACTUALLY A DREAM?

SARANNA-VISION: WHILE YOU PROCESS SUSIE'S MEMORIES, I WILL EXAMINE THIS SUPPOSED DREAM OF HERS.

INSIDE SUSIE'S MAYBE-DREAM...



OH, MY HEAD! THIS IS THE WRONG ONE! OH, WELL. SHE WILL SOON BREAK ANOTHER COMMANDMENT WHEN I FEEL BETTER, AND I'LL GO INSIDE HER HEAD AND GET HER THEN!

A FEW DAYS BEFORE I GOT ARJENFLORB SYNDROME, I DREAMED OF A WEIRD-HATTED LUMBER-CHICKEN.

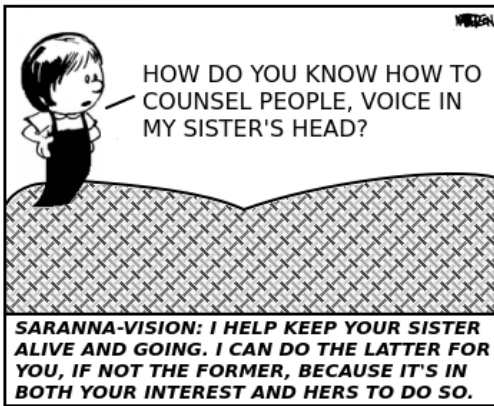


SARANNA-VISION: ANALYZING... THAT WAS NOT A DREAM. THE CHICKEN GOD WAS ACTUALLY TALKING TO YOU, ALBEIT ERRONEOUSLY. THE INCUBATION PERIOD OF ARJENFLORB SYNDROME IS FROM SEVERAL DAYS TO A WEEK AT MOST, WHICH PUTS IT IN RANGE FOR HIM TO HAVE INFECTED YOU WITH IT AT THAT TIME WITH HIS DIVINE POWER. AND HIS WEIRD HAT WAS A HOT WATER BOTTLE, TO HELP WITH HIS HEADACHE AT THE TIME.



WAIT, THAT BLASPHEMY-INDUCED MIGRAINE! AND IT WASN'T JUST A RUMOR THAT THE SYNDROME WAS A WAY FOR THE CHICKEN TO KILL HERETICS, AT LEAST SOME OF THE TIME! ...IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN HER, NOT ME...

IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN NEITHER OF YOU. REGARDLESS OF ANYTHING ELSE, AN EVIL GOD'S SPITE, HOWEVER MISAIMED, IS NO ONE'S FAULT BUT THE GOD'S. WITHOUT THAT MIGRAINE, MAX'S RESCUE MISSION WOULD HAVE LIKELY FAILED, AND THE CHICKEN WOULD WIN LONG-TERM, DOOMING US ALL!



HOW DO YOU KNOW HOW TO COUNSEL PEOPLE, VOICE IN MY SISTER'S HEAD?

SARANNA-VISION: I HELP KEEP YOUR SISTER ALIVE AND GOING. I CAN DO THE LATTER FOR YOU, IF NOT THE FORMER, BECAUSE IT'S IN BOTH YOUR INTEREST AND HERS TO DO SO.

SARANNA-VISION: FOR THE SAME REASON, I HAVE LET YOU INTO HER HEAD INSTEAD OF FREEZING YOU OUT. YOU ARE NOT HOSTILE TO HER; YOUR MEMORIES SHOW THAT MAX HAD SIMON MAGUSSAURUS LIBERATE YOU SOON AFTER YOU ARRIVED, SINCE HE HAD REASON TO BELIEVE THAT YOU WERE SARANNA'S REFLECTION, SO THE CHICKEN HAS NO MEANS TO GET HER MEMORIES FROM YOU; AND THE SNOW DEMONS WHO PUT ME HERE ARE PLEASED BY THAT.



AND THEY PUT YOU HERE BEFORE THE CHICKEN COULD GET IN HER HEAD TO INFECT HER! AND HER MEMORIES SAY THAT THE CHICKEN'S KEEPING HER ALIVE TO TRY TO GET ACCESS TO HER POWER!

YES. THEY WERE PLANNING ON DEALING WITH HER SOON, BUT THE INCIDENT WITH YOU CONVINCED THEM THAT RIGHT THEN WAS THE PERFECT TIME, BOTH TO DO WHAT THEY DO AND TO GET ONE OVER ON THE CHICKEN. YOU'LL UNDERSTAND MORE WHEN YOU PROCESS HER MEMORIES AS SHE HAS YOURS.

...SO I WAS THE CHICKEN'S REAL TARGET ALL ALONG... AT LEAST YOU GOT SOMETHING LIKE A NORMAL LIFE FOR YEARS BEFORE THAT, EVEN IF CALVIN WAS THE INCURABLE WEIRDNESS POSTER CHILD TO YOU! NOT THAT THE GOBLINS HAVEN'T BEEN GOOD TO ME!



HE SEEMS TO HAVE MELLOWED OUT IN THE YEARS SINCE I LEFT, YES. AND I HAD NO IDEA THAT COUSIN YOLANDA HAD GOTTEN SO FANATICAL! IF YOU'D ESCAPED ARJENFLORB SYNDROME AND DIDN'T HAVE THE SNOW DEMONS' PROTECTION, SHE'D HAVE HAD YOU THROWN IN THE DUNGEON AND KILLED FOR **SOMETHING!**

SARANNA-VISION: SHAMAN GHEFZARAL HAS BEEN WATCHING ALL YOUR DEALINGS WITH THE GHOSTS TO DETERMINE WHETHER YOU ARE WORTHY OF FULFILLING THE PROPHECY.

AT LEAST WE CAN TALK AT THE SPEED OF THOUGHT IN HERE. SO MUCH TO LEARN!

SARANNA-VISION: HE CANNOT SEE INSIDE HERE, BUT BOTH YOU AND CALVIN ARE ON THE VERGE OF PASSING THE TEST!



WE'VE BEEN WAITING HERE FOR A FEW MINUTES. HOW MUCH LONGER WILL THEY TAKE?

BOTH OF THEM STARTED TALKING AT ONCE. I SOON LEARNED THE IMPORTANT BITS OF WHAT THEY KNEW AFTER PUTTING THEIR HEADS TOGETHER: SOME ARJENFLORB INFECTIONS WERE DELIBERATELY CAUSED BY THE CHICKEN, SO THAT WASN'T A RUMOR AND HE WAS EVEN MORE EVIL THAN WE THOUGHT; AND SARANNA'S EVIL COUSIN WAS NAMED YOLANDA. (WHAT WAS UP WITH CHICKENIST FANATICS KEEPING THEIR REAL NAMES SECRET?)

ALSO, SARANNA WAS THE CHICKEN'S INTENDED TARGET, NOT SUSIE, AND THE SNOW DEMONS SAVED HER WITH THEIR DEAL. LOOKING BACK, I DON'T KNOW HOW THEY HANDLED KNOWING THAT SO WELL.



THEY'RE WAKING UP! LOOK!

BACK OUTSIDE...

I SPENT THE FIRST YEARS OF MY GHOSTHOOD GETTING USED TO IT. THE ORIENTATION COULD ONLY SHOW ME SO MUCH, AND DISCOVERING THE LIBRARY OF BOOKS BURNED IN THE LIVING WORLD WAS A GODSEND. OR AN ONI-SEND, SINCE MY CASEWORKER HIROAKI TOLD ME ABOUT IT.

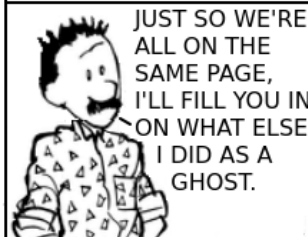


I WAS STILL WORRIED ABOUT YOU. AND SEEING WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO SUSIE, WHOM I BARELY KNEW AT THE TIME, AND HER TWIN, WHOM I DIDN'T KNOW AT ALL AT THE TIME, IT ONLY GOT WORSE.



GIVEN ALL THE MASS MURDERS?

WELL, MOST OF THE IMPORTANT BITS. HOW HAD MAX BEEN ABLE TO CONTACT SARANNA WHEN THE BARRIER BETWEEN REALMS WAS WEAK? HOW HAD BRIAN ARRIVED HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE? SUSIE AND SARANNA MIGHT KNOW THE ANSWERS, BUT I DIDN'T YET.



JUST SO WE'RE ALL ON THE SAME PAGE, I'LL FILL YOU IN ON WHAT ELSE I DID AS A GHOST.

THAT REMINDS ME: I NEED TO GET BACK IN TOUCH WITH "SEYMOUR," OR S-MKDVBPHDZRTB-013804-2831025427049128090-3269983702310785328.

ANOTHER ROBOT? HOW MANY ARE YOU IN CONTACT WITH?

NO, SEYMOUR IS THE NAME HE WAS BORN WITH. HIS ROBOT NAME IS HONORARY.



YOU HAVE A LOT OF FRIENDS!

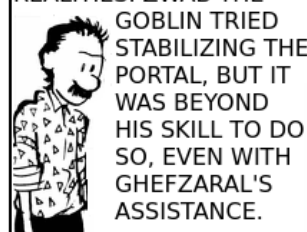
MAX: I DECIDED TO TRY AND PULL CALVIN HERE TO FIND OUT HOW HE WAS DOING. IT DEFIED THE PROPHECY, SINCE SOME OTHER PARTS OF IT HADN'T YET COME TO PASS, BUT SHAMAN GHEFZARAL AGREED IT WAS AN EMERGENCY. SOME PROPHECIES COULD BE BENT TO A DEGREE WITHOUT BREAKING THEM ENTIRELY. UNFORTUNATELY, WE FOUND OUT THAT THIS PROPHECY WOULDN'T BEND THAT WAY.

ROBOT CALVIN: "BRIAN."

WOLF CALVIN: "SEYMOUR."



IT TURNED OUT THAT, SINCE THE PROPHECY WOULDN'T BEND, SOMETHING ELSE HAD TO: THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN REALITIES. ZWAB THE



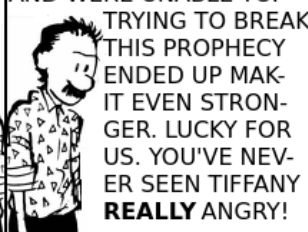
GOBLIN TRIED STABILIZING THE PORTAL, BUT IT WAS BEYOND HIS SKILL TO DO SO, EVEN WITH GHEFZARAL'S ASSISTANCE.

ZWAB WAS BEFORE MY TIME. I HOPE HE DIDN'T END UP INJURED!

NO, BUT WE PULLED BRIAN THE ROBOT HERE INSTEAD, AND PUT SEYMOUR THE WOLF WHERE BRIAN USED TO BE, AS YOU KNOW!

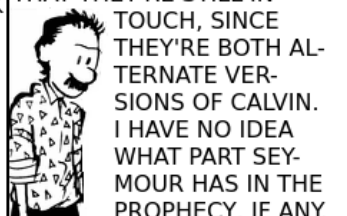


TIFFANY WAS FURIOUS, AND THE ONI SPACE-WARDENS WERE, TOO. UNTIL THEY TRIED PUTTING BRIAN AND SEYMOUR BACK, AND WERE UNABLE TO.



TRYING TO BREAK THIS PROPHECY ENDED UP MAKING IT EVEN STRONGER. LUCKY FOR US. YOU'VE NEVER SEEN TIFFANY **REALLY** ANGRY!

BRIAN AND SEYMOUR WERE PUT IN A MULTIVERSAL HOLDING ROOM DURING THE MONTH-LONG ATTEMPT TO PUT THEM BOTH BACK, AND THEY BONDED ENOUGH THAT THEY'RE STILL IN



TOUCH, SINCE THEY'RE BOTH ALTERNATE VERSIONS OF CALVIN. I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT PART SEYMOUR HAS IN THE PROPHECY, IF ANY.

I SUSPECT THAT HE HAS A PART TO PLAY IN A DIFFERENT PROPHECY, GIVEN OUR LAST CORRESPONDENCE. HE IS GOING UP AGAINST ANOTHER DEMI-URGE, THE LATHESHEEP, AND TURNING THAT DEMI-URGE'S FOLLOWERS INTO MUTTON.



HEY BRIAN! I HAD AN ENCOUNTER I JUST HAD TO TELL YOU ABOUT...

I HAVE ANOTHER QUESTION ABOUT THE DUNGEON GOBLINS. ALL THE ONES EVERYONE TALKS ABOUT GET CALLED "HE." ARE THEY ALL GUYS?



BUT DUE TO HIS NOT BEING FEY, AND NOT HAVING VISION LIKE MINE, HE CAN HAVE TROUBLE TELLING THEM APART AT ALL, MUCH LESS DETERMINING THEIR GENDER. IRONIC, GIVEN HIS FIXATION ON GENDER.



OKAY. BUT IF HIS POWERS DON'T WORK ON FEY, HOW DID HE SUBVERT THEIR MAGIC TO ENSLAVE THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE?



SARANNA, YOU'D KNOW THIS BETTER THAN I.



MOST PRETEND TO BE, DUE TO THE CHICKEN'S GENDER BIASES, BUT THEY ACTUALLY ONLY TAKE ON A GENDER ONCE A MONTH, DURING MATING SEASON.

BUT WHEN THE CHICKEN SUBVERTED THEIR FEY MAGIC TO MAKE THE MAGICAL TETHER USED TO ENSLAVE THEM, HE TETHERED THEIR MATING, TOO. HE ONLY ALLOWS IT WHEN HE NEEDS THEM TO PRODUCE MORE SLAVES.



BRIAN: MY INITIAL ARRIVAL IN THIS REALITY WAS CONFUSING, BUT, AS WITH THE DESTRUCTION OF MY NATIVE REALITY, I ADAPTED QUICKLY.

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WHO ARE YOU, AND WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

I WAS AS GOOD AT TRANSLATING THEN AS I AM NOW, ALTHOUGH I GAVE THE SHORT VERSION OF WHAT I SAID AT THE TIME.

UH... I FEEL AS THOUGH I WAS RUN OVER BY A TRUCK!



YOU'RE IN ANOTHER REALITY, AND THE TRANSITION CAN BE ROUGH. SHAMAN GHEFZARAL, IS THERE A WAY TO FIX THIS?

I HAD BEEN WANDERING THROUGH SEVERAL DIFFERENT REALITIES BEFORE I WAS PULLED HERE, MOSTLY FILLED WITH CORPSES AND WRECKAGE OF WHATEVER THEY HAD LEFT BEHIND. THIS WAS THE FIRST PLACE I FOUND WHERE I COULD ACTUALLY SPEAK WITH THE DEAD. AFTER I FOUND OUT THAT RETURNING WAS NOT AN OPTION, I MADE THE BEST OF THINGS HERE.



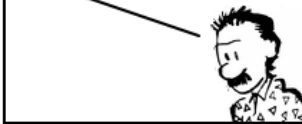
DO YOU EVER MISS HOME?

SOMETIMES, BUT WITH MY OWN REALITY DESTROYED AND UNCOUNTABLE OTHERS RUINED, THIS IS THE BEST PLACE TO BE, ALL THINGS CONSIDERED.

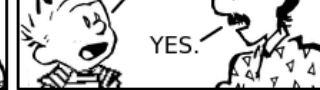


I WONDER WHY THIS PLACE ISN'T RUINED!

BRIAN AND I TOOK A CLASS ON THE MULTIVERSE AND COSMOLOGY DURING THE YEARS WE WERE WAITING FOR YOU, AND WE LEARNED THAT WE'RE MORE FORTUNATE THAN MANY OTHER REALITIES, BELIEVE IT OR NOT!



A TORTURING, MASS-MURDERING, EUGENICIST, AXE-WIELDING CHICKEN GOD WITH AN ARMY OF TRANSFORMED TELEKINETIC BUTT-PEOPLE, BRAINWASHED ORDINARY PEOPLE, ENSLAVED DUNGEON GOBLINS, WILLING GUN GNOMES, AND GODS KNOW WHAT ELSE COULD BE WORSE?



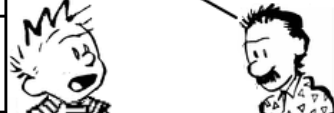
YES.

THE REASON THE PLEROMA COUNCIL WORKS SO WELL IS BECAUSE THE MONOTHEISTIC GODS WHO COULD NOT PLAY WELL WITH OTHERS ARE DEAD. IN REALITIES WHERE THEY ARE NOT, THEY FIGHT SO HARD TO CLAIM ULTIMATE LEADERSHIP THAT THEY LAY THE LOCAL UNIVERSE TO WASTE MORE OFTEN THAN NOT. THE CHICKEN'S TURNING THE MOST AUTHORITARIAN GODS, HIS DIRECT COMPETITION, INTO POOP ENSURED THIS REALITY'S LONG-TERM SURVIVAL.



WHAT IF A GOD IN THE COUNCIL GETS CORRUPTED AND TRIES TO CLAIM THEY'RE THE ONLY TRUE GOD WHO GETS TO RUN THINGS?

THE OTHER GODS HAVE A PACT TO BAND TOGETHER AND DESTROY THEM AS SOON AS THAT HAPPENS.



AND AS YOU TOLD SUSIE, SOME OF THE ONI ARE POWERFUL ENOUGH TO HOLD THE GODS' LEASHES IF MULTIPLE ONES GET CORRUPTED AT ONCE.



RIGHT. YOU SEEM TO BE TAKING YOUR NEW MEMORIES WELL.

SO ALL MONOTHEISMS END UP CORRUPTED EVENTUALLY?

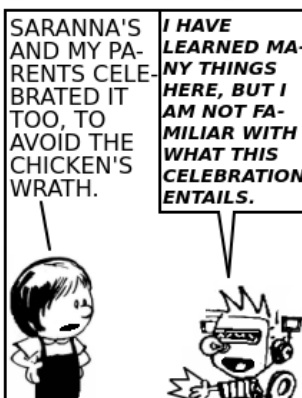
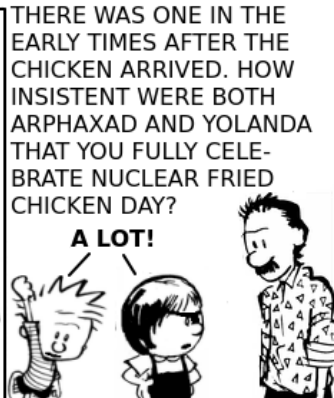
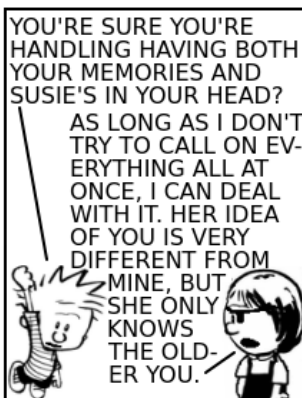
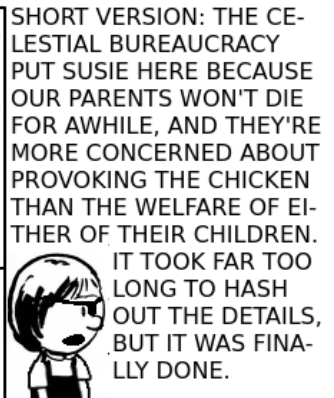
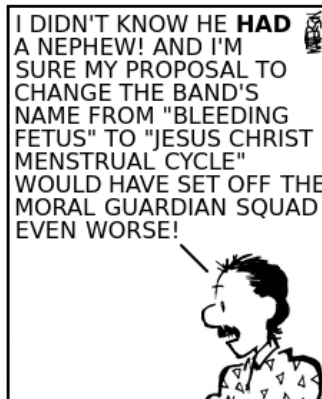
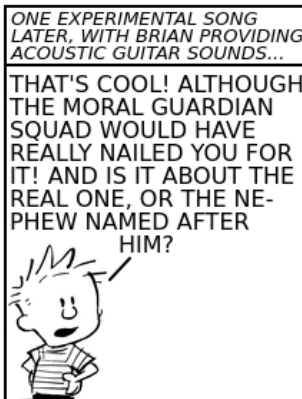
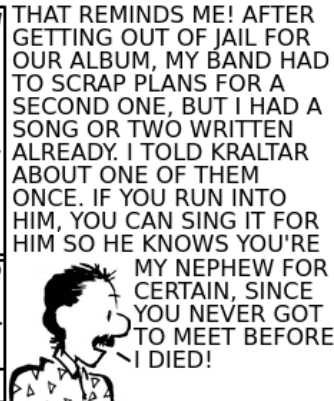
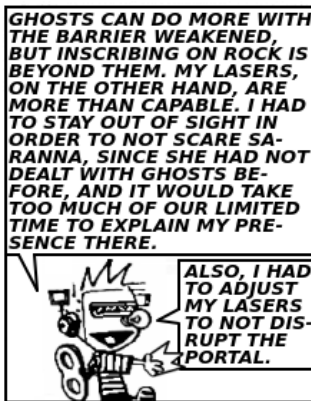
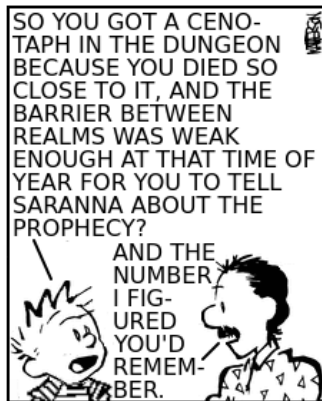
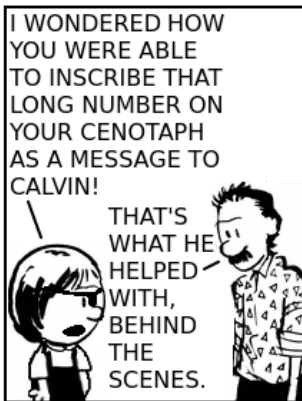
IT SEEMS SO. ALL THE WORSHIPPERS WHO CARE MORE ABOUT COMPASSION THAN POWER GET CALLED RENEGADES AND WIPED OUT BY THE WORSE ONES.



I'VE MENTIONED THE RENEGADE CHRISTIANS BEFORE, BUT THERE ARE SO MANY OTHERS. SOME FORMS OF PLURALISTIC MONOTHEISM CAN ADAPT TO POLYTHEISM AND SURVIVE. I HAVE NO IDEA ABOUT DREMVALAAR, EVEN THOUGH BRIAN FOUND THEIR COUNTERPART IN ANOTHER REALITY DURING HIS WANDERINGS.



BUT LET ME GET BACK TO MY GHOSTLY EXPLOITS. BRIAN HAD ADAPTED TO MY LANGUAGE, AS WELL AS TO FEEDING ON ECTOPLASM TO NOT STARVE. AFTER THE FAILED ATTEMPT TO PUT HIM BACK, HE STARTED STUDYING HOW THIS GHOST REALM WORKED, JUST IN CASE. IT CAME IN HANDY AFTER SARANNA ARRIVED IN THE DUNGEON.



I LOOKED UP THE DETAILS OF IT AFTER I ARRIVED AND WENT THROUGH ORIENTATION. ALL THE GHOSTS OF PEOPLE BEING MASS MURDERED BY THE BIG FOUR AND THEN THE CHICKEN REMINDED ME OF IT. IT WAS SHEER MORBID CURIOSITY ON MY PART.



IT WAS SOMETHING THE OLD TRINITY STARTED: ONE GROUP OF PEOPLE GOT EXILED FROM THEIR HOMELAND AND WERE OPPRESSED FOR AGES, AND THERE WAS A PROPHECY THAT THEY'D GET IT BACK, AND THEN THEY'D ALL DIE EXCEPT FOR A CHUNK OF THEM WHO WOULD CONVERT TO THE OLD TRINITY!



BUT SURELY OTHER PEOPLE HAD MOVED INTO THEIR OLD HOMELAND IN THE MEANTIME?

EXACTLY. YET ANOTHER FIGHT OVER WHO GETS TO RIGHTFULLY LIVE ON WHICH LAND.

WHAT MADE THIS FIGHT MORE SPECIAL THAN OTHERS?

THE SUPPOSED PROPHECY ABOUT IT.



IT STATED THAT THE OLD TRINITY WOULD TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN AFFAIRS AND BECOME THE OFFICIAL RULER OF EARTH INSTEAD OF WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES HALF THE TIME. SOME OF THE EXILES DIDN'T BELIEVE THE DEATH-AND-CONVERSION PART OF THE PROPHECY, AND THEY BEFRIENDED RICH AND POWERFUL OLD TRINITY WORSHIPPERS IN ORDER TO GET THEIR HELP GOING TO WAR.



AND THEN THE PROPHECY GOT BROKEN WHEN THE LUMBERCHICKEN CAME AND TURNED THE OLD TRINITY INTO THE BUTT-VICEROY, OR SO WE THOUGHT UNTIL HE MADE THAT DEAL WITH THE EXILES ON THE BUTT-VICEROY'S BEHALF, RIGHT? OR AM I MISSING SOMETHING HERE?



THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT, TOO, BUT ANY PROPHECY THAT GETS BENT OR BROKEN IS SUPPOSED TO BACKLASH IN SOME WAY. I DOUBLE-CHECKED THE PROPHECY RECORDS HERE. IT WAS NEVER A REAL PROPHECY. THE BACKLASH FROM IT WASN'T SUBTLE, IT WAS NONEXISTENT.



NEITHER THE EXILES NOR THE CURRENT INHABITANTS OF THE LAND WORSHIPPED THE OLD TRINITY. THEY WORSHIPPED OTHER MONOTHEISMS INSTEAD FOR THE MOST PART. IT WAS ALL A LIE BY THE OLD TRINITY TO MAKE HIS RELIGIOUS RIVALS MASS MURDER EACH OTHER.



AND WHILE THE OLD TRINITY LOVED BLOODY BATTLE, IT ESPECIALLY LOVED BLOODY BATTLE TILTED GREATLY IN FAVOR OF ITS CHOSEN SIDE.

YES. THE EXILES, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THEIR FRIENDS, HAD A GREAT ADVANTAGE. BUT, ON BOTH SIDES, IT WAS MOSTLY THE LEADERS PUSHING TO KEEP THE WAR GOING.

WHILE ORDINARY CIVILIANS AND CHILDREN DIED FOR THEM.



AS WELL AS THE ACTUAL COMBATANTS, WHOSE ATROCITIES GOT WORSE AND WORSE. THE END CAME WHEN THE CHICKEN OFFERED THE EXILES A DEAL. THEY COULD WORSHIP HIM OR NOT, BUT EITHER WAY HE WOULD ENSURE THEIR LASTING VICTORY. THEY WERE CLOSE TO WINNING, BUT THAT WORD CONVINCED THEM.



WELL, THAT AND A DEMONSTRATION OF WHAT HE COULD DO. HE SAID THEY ALL WOULD HAVE THE LAND TO THEMSELVES AS LONG AS THEY LIVED, THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO SUCCESSFULLY ADAPT TO ANY ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS IN IT, AND HE WOULD SET UP A SHIELD TO PROTECT THEM FROM ALL OUTSIDE HOSTILE FORCES.



WHAT DID HE WANT IN RETURN FOR ALL THAT? HIS NOT REQUIRING WORSHIP IS NOT LIKE HIM, AND HIS DOING FAVORS IS EVEN LESS SO.

ONE THING: FOR THEM TO STOP SHOWING ANY MERCY AND DESTROY ALL ENEMIES THERE.



MAX: THEIR LEADERS AGREED TO THE TERMS AND WIPED OUT THEIR ENEMIES ENTIRELY. AND THAT LED TO THE CHICKEN'S MASTERSTROKE. THEY HAD A STOCKPILE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS, AND HE DELIBERATELY SET THEM ALL OFF AT ONCE, INSIDE THEIR SHIELD.



EVERYTHING LIVING IN THAT LAND DIED IN THE SERIES OF EXPLOSIONS, EXCEPT FOR THE PEOPLE WHOSE LAND IT NOW OFFICIALLY WAS BY THE CHICKEN'S DECREE. AND THEY FOUND THAT THEY WERE MUTATED TO THE POINT WHERE THEY COULD SUSTAIN THEMSELVES BY FEEDING ON THE RADIATION ITSELF.



OUTSIDE THE LAND, THE RADIATION LEVELS WERE LOW ENOUGH BY COMPARISON THAT THEIR NEW FORMS STARVED, SO THEY WERE STUCK BEHIND THEIR SHIELD. THEY ALSO FOUND THAT THEY WERE STERILE FROM THE RADIATION AND WOULD HAVE NO DESCENDANTS. THEY COMPLAINED TO THE CHICKEN, AND HE SAID...



"YOUR LAND IS NOW ENTIRELY YOURS, YOU ARE UNIQUELY SUITED TO IT FOR LIFE, AND NO ONE WILL TAKE IT FROM YOU! I NEVER SAID I'D LET YOUR DESCENDANTS HAVE IT! WHAT, WILL YOU CALL ON ME FOR MERCY WHEN YOU SHOWED NONE?" IT'S INSCRIBED ON THAT HISTORICAL PLAQUE!



YES. THEY'RE LEFT TO DIE OF OLD AGE OR COMMIT SUICIDE, AND THE SHIELD KEEPS ALL OF THE RADIATION INSIDE. THE WORST THING IS, THE OLD TRINITY PICKED SIDES FOR THEIR "PROPHECY" BY FLIPPING A COIN, AND THE OTHER SIDE ACTS THE SAME WAY IN REALITIES WHERE IT GETS THE POWER, THE LAND, AND THE CHICKEN'S INTERVENTION. NUCLEAR DEATH FOR BOTH SIDES.



SO, BRIAN, THAT'S WHY YOU HADN'T HEARD OF THAT HOLIDAY. ALL THE RESEARCH I DID ON IT WAS BEFORE YOU GOT HERE, AND NO ONE ACKNOWLEDGES IT UNLESS IT COMES UP, MUCH LESS CELEBRATES IT, UNLESS THEY'RE IN THE LUMBERCHICKEN'S CROSSHAIRS AND FORCED TO DO IT!



AND THE DEAD WHO DO ARE THE ONES IN THE LUMBERCHICKEN'S BOSOM AND FAR, FAR AWAY FROM THIS PLACE!

THAT MAKES SENSE. MY PEOPLE HAVE A RARELY-MENTIONED GOD OF RUIN WHO ACTED SIMILARLY.



AS THE SAYING GOES: 3245242228233251141-2416272985472371410-3885240617277117322-3259130688125823543-3259108103088807536-1443829435325344631-2854280388638668564.

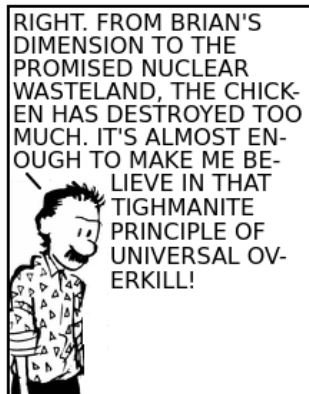
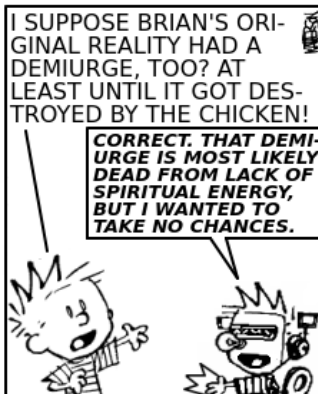
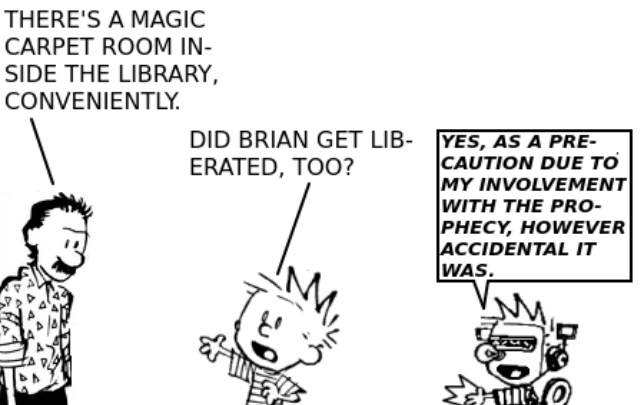
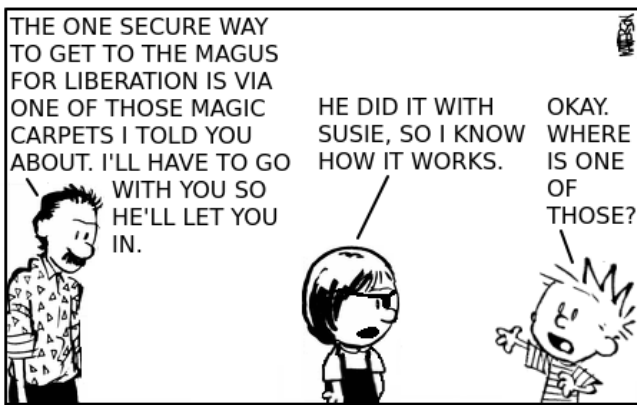
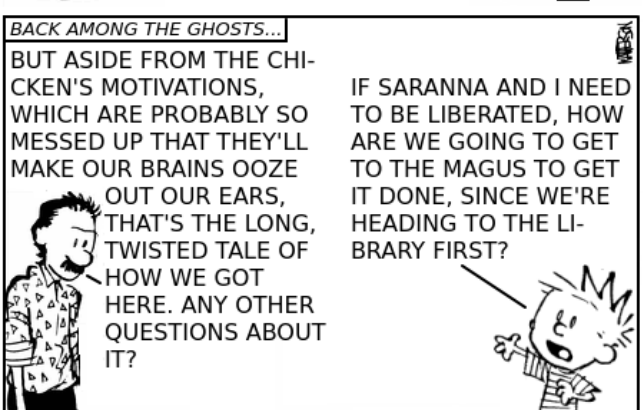
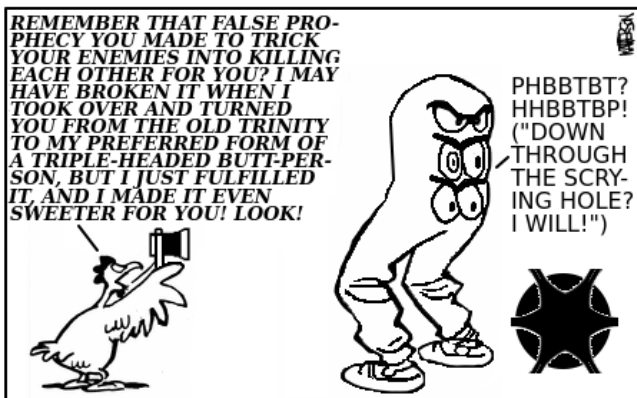
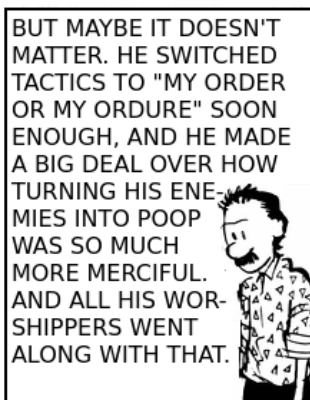
YES, THAT FITS!



ONE OF THESE YEARS, I'LL HAVE TO LEARN ROBOT-SPEAK SO I CAN FULLY UNDERSTAND BRIAN!

WHEN YOU'RE OLDER. BOTH ROBOTS AND HUMANS CAN BE DEPRAVED.





THE LIBRARY WAS SO BIG THAT IT WAS DIVIDED INTO SEVERAL SUB-LIBRARIES, AND SOME PEOPLE EVEN HELD CLASSES THERE. TO CALL IT DAUNTING WOULD BE AN UNDERSTATEMENT.

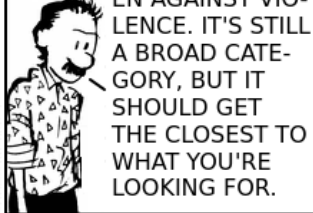


-WHOA!

THERE'S SO MUCH HERE! THE HARD PART IS GOING TO BE FIGURING OUT WHICH BOOKS HAVE THE INFORMATION WE NEED! IF IT WERE EASY, THE LUMBERCHICKEN WOULD BE LONG GONE BY NOW!

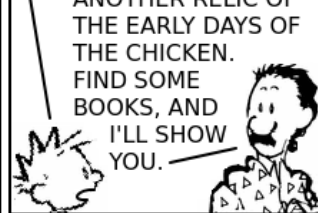


THERE'S A WAY TO NARROW IT DOWN. SEARCH FOR ANYTHING FLAGGED AS CENSORED BY THE H.C.A.V., THE HIEROPHANTS FOR THE CHICKEN AGAINST VIOLENCE. IT'S STILL A BROAD CATEGORY, BUT IT SHOULD GET THE CLOSEST TO WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR.



THE H.C.A.V. SOUNDS FAMILIAR, BUT I DON'T KNOW THAT MUCH ABOUT IT.

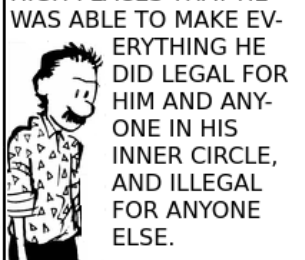
ANOTHER RELIC OF THE EARLY DAYS OF THE CHICKEN. FIND SOME BOOKS, AND I'LL SHOW YOU.



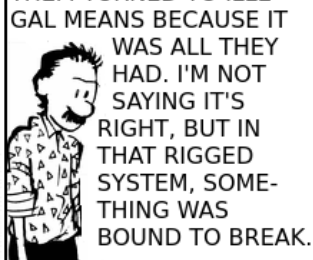
HERE ARE A FEW! A BOOK OF BABY NAMES AND A BOOK OF MOVIE QUOTES! BUT WHY ARE THOSE CONSIDERED VIOLENT?



THE CHICKEN WAS PARANOID ABOUT IT IN THE BEGINNING. HE FOUND ENOUGH SUPPORTERS IN HIGH PLACES THAT HE WAS ABLE TO MAKE EVERYTHING HE DID LEGAL FOR HIM AND ANYONE IN HIS INNER CIRCLE, AND ILLEGAL FOR ANYONE ELSE.



WHEN THERE WERE NO LEGAL MEANS FOR SOME PEOPLE TO GET WHAT THEY NEEDED, SOME OF THEM TURNED TO ILLEGAL MEANS BECAUSE IT WAS ALL THEY HAD. I'M NOT SAYING IT'S RIGHT, BUT IN THAT RIGGED SYSTEM, SOMETHING WAS BOUND TO BREAK.



SO HE WAS STILL DOING THE "SOME FAVORED AND LOTS OF DISFAVORED" THING YOU TALKED ABOUT, EVEN THEN?

RIGHT. THAT WAS ALWAYS HIS THING. ONLY HIS METHODS CHANGED.

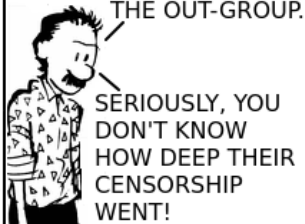


ANYONE OPPOSING THE CHICKEN GOT CENSORED FOR ANY SPEECH THAT MIGHT REMOTELY BE CONSIDERED VIOLENT, WHILE ANYONE FAVORING THE CHICKEN COULD GET AWAY WITH BOTH VIOLENT SPEECH AND ACTION, SO LONG AS THEY WERE ON HIS BEHALF!



WHICH IS WHY HIS ORDER OF RELIGIOUS CENSORS, THE H.C.A.V., WAS USUALLY UNABBREVIATED AS "HYPOCRITES, ADVANCED" BY THOSE IN THE OUT-GROUP.

SERIOUSLY, YOU DON'T KNOW HOW DEEP THEIR CENSORSHIP WENT!



OR MAYBE YOU DO. DID ANYONE IN YOUR SCHOOL SUDDENLY HAVE TO CHANGE NAMES?

THERE WAS A LUNA SELENE WHO HAD TO START GOING BY "MOON MOON" INSTEAD!

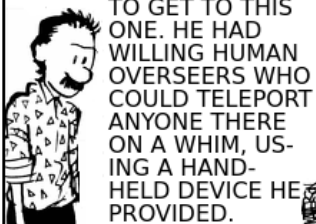


RIGHT, THE EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL MINE TELEPORTATION INCIDENT WITH THE TWINS...

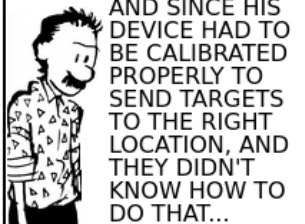
WHAT WAS THAT?



WHILE THE CHICKEN CONSOLIDATED HIS POWER, HE GOT RID OF MOST OF HIS OPPOSITION BY DEPORTING THEM TO MINES IN ONE OF THE DIMENSIONS HE'D TRAVELED THROUGH TO GET TO THIS ONE. HE HAD WILLING HUMAN OVERSEERS WHO COULD TELEPORT ANYONE THERE ON A WHIM, USING A HAND-HELD DEVICE HE PROVIDED.



LUNA AND SELENE WERE A SET OF TWINS WHO SURPRISED AN OVERSEER WHO'D SENT THEIR FRIENDS TO THE MINES, OVERPOWERED HIM, AND USED HIS DEVICE ON HIM. AND SINCE HIS DEVICE HAD TO BE CALIBRATED PROPERLY TO SEND TARGETS TO THE RIGHT LOCATION, AND THEY DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO DO THAT...



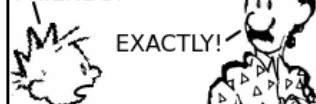
HE MATERIALIZED IN SOLID ROCK, DIED INSTANTLY, AND THE TWINS' NAMES WERE ADDED TO THE "POTENTIAL VIOLENCE" LIST JUST BEFORE THEY WERE EXECUTED. SO MUCH HYPE ABOUT HOW THE OVERSEER HAD A FAMILY, BUT NOTHING ABOUT ALL THE FAMILIES HE'D DESTROYED.



IT WAS LEGALLY DOCUMENTED AS TWO FAKE HUMANS KILLING A REAL HUMAN, WHICH IS WHY IT TURNED OUT LIKE THAT.

IT'S ONLY BECAUSE HE HAD THE RIGHT FRIENDS!

EXACTLY!

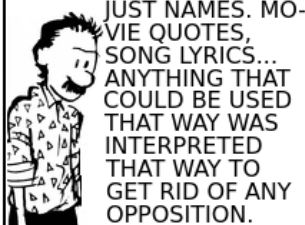


AND ALL THIS TIME I THOUGHT IT WAS BECAUSE "MOON MOON" HAD SUNG THAT SONG "THE HANDS ON THE PHALLUS GO UP AND DOWN" EARLIER THAT DAY! A PHALLUS IS A TYPE OF GUN, RIGHT?

UH... NO, BUT IT'S STILL INAPPROPRIATE.



LEAVING ASIDE WHAT SOME PEOPLE CAN DO TO "THE WHEELS ON THE BUS GO ROUND AND ROUND," THE ANTI-VIOLENCE CENSORSHIP APPLIED TO MORE THAN JUST NAMES. MOVIE QUOTES, SONG LYRICS... ANYTHING THAT COULD BE USED THAT WAY WAS INTERPRETED THAT WAY TO GET RID OF ANY OPPOSITION.



I WAS WARNED ONCE. IT WAS IN COLLEGE AFTER THE BAND INCIDENT. IN ONE CLASS, IF YOU WERE LATE, YOU HAD TO SING. IT WAS IN THE SYLLABUS, AND I WAS LATE.

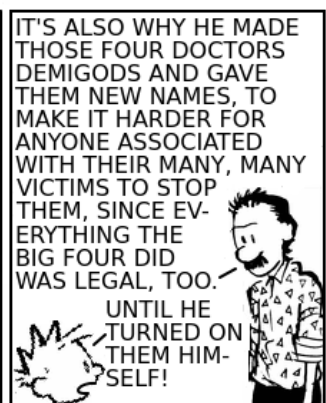
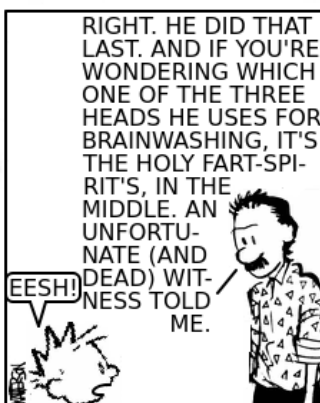
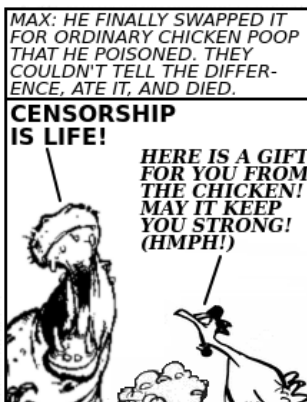
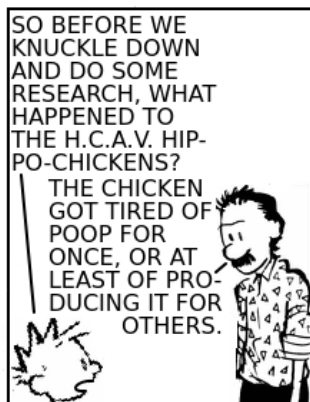
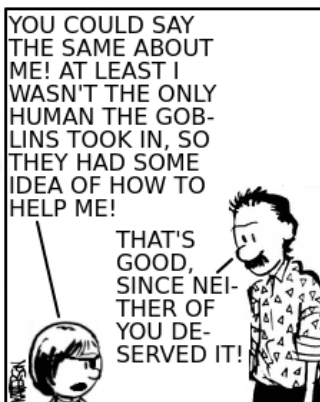
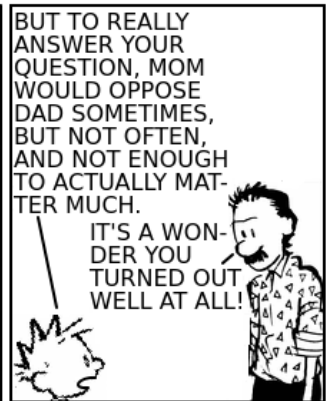
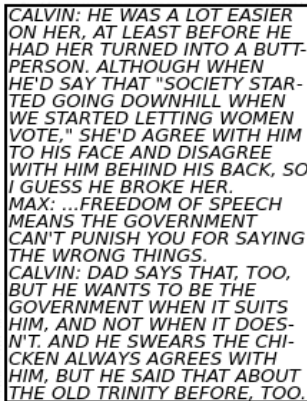
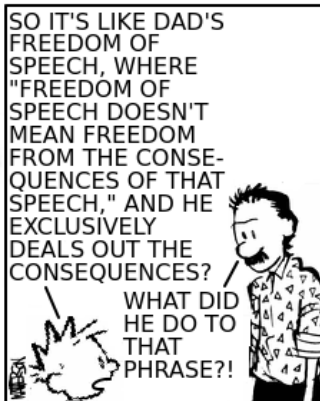
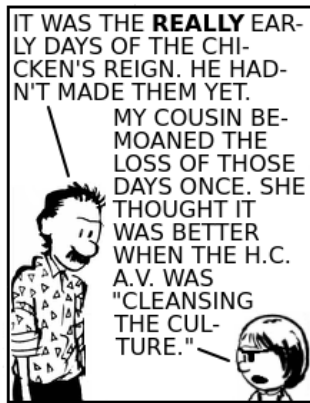
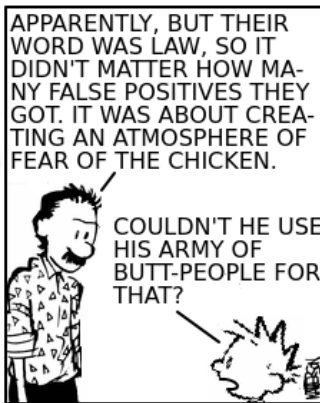


SOUNDS COOL! WHAT SONG DID YOU PICK?

"KUNG FU FIGHTING." I WASN'T GOING TO ACTUALLY FIGHT ANYONE, BUT THE H.C.A.V. DIDN'T CARE. I'M LUCKY I ONLY DREW THEIR ATTENTION ONCE!

DID THEY JUST LISTEN FOR CERTAIN WORDS, OR WHAT?






YOU'RE NOT FAZED BY HAVING TO TURN SOMEONE INTO A GIANT HEAD?

THE RIGHT KIND OF MAGIC CAN DO A LOT. THE SPACE TRAVEL PART IS THE HARD BIT.

IF PEOPLE CAN BE TURNED INTO LIVING BUTTS, I GUESS SO!



THEN THROW THE HEAD AT WHERE THE GIANT'S HEAD SHOULD BE, AND HE'LL ABSORB AND KILL IT. THEN FUSE ALL THE ENEMY'S FOLLOWERS INTO ONE PERSON AND DESTROY GRAVITY FOR THEM SO THEY FLY INTO SPACE AND DIE, TOO.



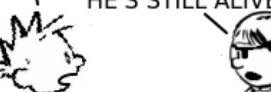
YOUR SARANNA-VISION DID SAY YOU HAD TO GO INTO SPACE, BUT THAT SEEMS LIKE A LOT TO DO. AND WHAT'S UP WITH THE WIZARD'S HAVING SUCH A BULKED-UP BODY AND SUCH A TINY HEAD IN THE AUTHOR PICTURE?

HE'S LIKELY NOT ACTUALLY A HUMAN.




BUT HE DISGUISES HIMSELF AS ONE TO NOT SCARE PEOPLE, LIKE THE CEL-DINOS USED TO?

RIGHT. STRIKING FEAR INTO EVIL-DOERS IS HIS THING, WHEN HE DECIDES TO INTERVENE, BUT I DON'T KNOW IF HE'S STILL ALIVE.




BUT THE PROPHECY ISN'T ABOUT HIM, EVEN IF WE USE ONE OF HIS METHODS.

RIGHT. AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT REALITY HE'S FROM, CONSIDERING THAT MARS GETS SET ON FIRE, HURLED AT EARTH, AND THEN PUT BACK IN ANOTHER OF HIS ACCOUNTS.




YES, AN ENTIRE PLANET SET ON FIRE AND THROWN AROUND WOULD HAVE GOTTEN ON THE NEWS! AND IF IT HAPPENED HERE, MAYBE IT COULD HAVE TAKEN OUT THE ARCHON OF MARS IF THE FIRE WAS STRONG ENOUGH! BUT THAT'S NOT THIS REALITY. WHAT DOES YOUR VISION SAY ABOUT THE PLAN?




LET'S SEE... THERE IS A HEADLESS HEADHUNTER IN THIS REALITY. BUT HIS POWERS WORK AS DESCRIBED ONLY ON MORTALS. THE CHICKEN GOD'S HEAD WOULD MELD WITH HIS BODY AND TAKE IT OVER INSTEAD OF BEING ABSORBED. THE BUTT-ARMY WOULD NOT BE STOPPED BY BEING FUSED AND LOSING GRAVITY, SINCE THEY COULD USE TELEKINESIS TO COMPENSATE FOR THE LATTER. AND IF THE BUTT-ARMY GOT TO THE GIANT... THEY DON'T HAVE HEADS FOR HIM TO ABSORB, AND THERE'S NO BUTTLESS BUTT-HUNTER HERE WHO COULD ABSORB THEIR BUTTS, COLLECTIVE OR FUSED. SO THAT PLAN'S A BUST.

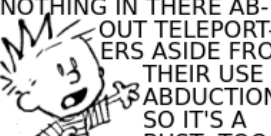
AT LEAST WE KNOW NOW. DID YOU FIND ANYTHING USEFUL?



I LOOKED MORE INTO THE EXTRADIMENSIONAL MINES THAT MAX MENTIONED, SINCE THE HAND-HELD TELEPORTERS THAT TOOK PEOPLE THERE MIGHT BE USEFUL TO TAKE US OTHER PLACES. THE CHICKEN MAY HAVE ABANDONED THEM, BUT SOME PEOPLE STILL LIVE THERE AND MAKE HOMES THERE!




SOME OF THE GHOSTS FROM THERE FOUND THEIR WAY BACK TO THIS REALITY, AND ONE WROTE A BOOK ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES! IT'S COOL THAT THEY FOUND A WAY TO THRIVE ON... WHAT DID THEY CALL IT... NIRIMAR, BUT THERE'S NOTHING IN THERE ABOUT TELEPORTERS ASIDE FROM THEIR USE IN ABDUCTION, SO IT'S A BUST, TOO!



I HOPE MAX, SUSIE, AND BRIAN HAVE HAD BETTER LUCK FINDING BOOKS WE CAN USE!

I HOPE SO, TOO, BUT THE PROPHECY DIRECTLY APPLIES TO US, SO WE HAVE TO BE THE ONES TO FIND THE GOLD NUGGETS IN THE DIRT!



CALVIN: YOU SOUND LIKE THAT BOOK OF BARDIC PROVERBS I FOUND!

SARANNA: WHAT WAS IN IT?

CALVIN: "THE STRONG GIVE UP AND MOVE ON, WHILE THE WEAK GIVE UP AND STAY." "IF YOU CHOOSE NOT TO DECIDE, YOU STILL HAVE MADE A CHOICE." "NOTHING GIVES EASY, EASY GIVES NOTHING." STUFF LIKE THAT.

SARANNA: SOUNDS LIKE SONG LYRICS IN BOOK FORM! BUT OF COURSE THE CHICKEN WOULD CENSOR WISDOM LIKE THAT IF IT DIDN'T PRAISE HIM UNCONDITIONALLY!

I TRACKED DOWN UNCLE MAX AND TOLD HIM ABOUT ALL OF THE BOOKS WE'D LOOKED INTO. SARANNA HAD GONE THROUGH SEVERAL GRIMOIRES BEFORE WIZARD STARDUST'S, AND I'D GONE THROUGH SEVERAL BOOKS ON HISTORY BEFORE THE NIRIMARIANS. WE NEEDED A DIFFERENT APPROACH.

THIS IS SUCH A FRUSTRATING SEARCH! TELL ME ABOUT THE GODS YOU'VE WORKED WITH. MAYBE IT'LL GIVE ME SOME NEW IDEAS!




I DID, AND HE GOT THE OTHERS AND CONSULTED WITH THEM.

DOES ANYONE KNOW WHAT TO DO HERE?


THE PROPHECY SPEAKS OF A GUIDE AND AN ANIMUS, WHOM WE HAVE YET TO DISCOVER AND ARE NOT OBVIOUS TO ME, GODS NOTWITHSTANDING.



I HAVE AN IDEA! WITH THE WAY EVERYONE HAS TO BE LIBERATED TO PROPERLY FIGHT THE CHICKEN, WHAT IF THE ANIMUS IS SOMETHING THAT ISN'T LIVING IN THE USUAL SENSE? I JUST KEEP THINKING OF MY OLD STUFFED RABBIT, MR. BUN, AND HOW HE AND I HAD SO MANY ADVENTURES TOGETHER BEFORE I LOST HIM WHEN WE MOVED!



IMAGINATION COUNTS AS ANOTHER FORM OF ANIMISM! SARANNA WOULDN'T THINK OF IT OFFHAND BECAUSE OUR COUSIN TRIED TO STOMP IMAGINATION OUT OF HER FOR YEARS! THE GOBLINS LET HER USE IT, BUT HER APTITUDE FOR MAGIC IS HAMPERED BY THE TIME SHE SPENT SUPPRESSING IT! THE PROPHECY WON'T WAIT!



SHE TRIED TO STOMP IMAGINATION OUT OF A KID? SAINT URFLENZAK'S WHEELS! WHY WOULD SHE DO THAT?!

I SOON LEARNED URFLENZAK WAS A SAINT OF THE UNJUSTLY DISABLED WHO ORIGINATED IN ANOTHER REALITY. SHE WAS VENERATED A LOT AFTER THE CHICKEN'S DEFEAT.



SHE FIGURED SARANNA'S ONLY REAL PURPOSE WAS TO MAKE YOLKS FOR THE CHICKEN, AND SHE WOULDN'T NEED IMAGINATION THEN.

YET ANOTHER REASON TO TAKE THE CHICKEN DOWN! CALVIN, DID MY BROTHER DO THAT TO YOU?




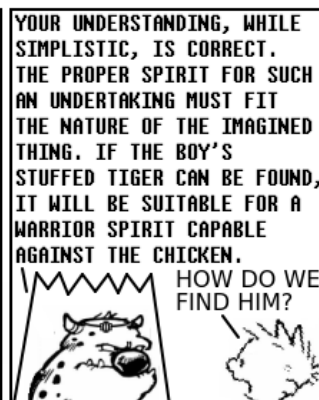
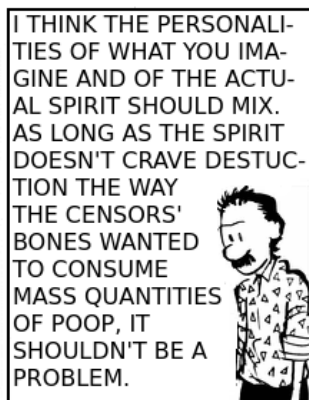
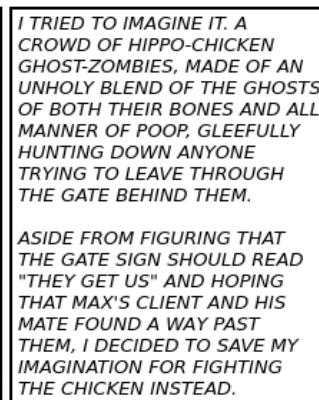
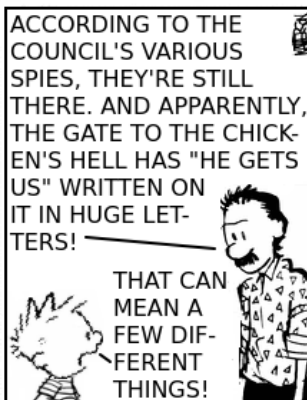
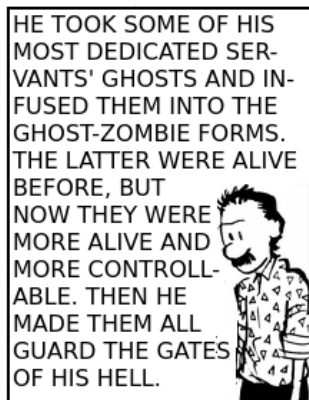
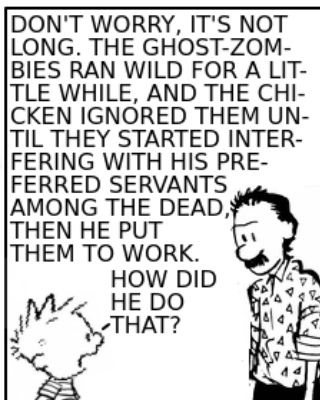
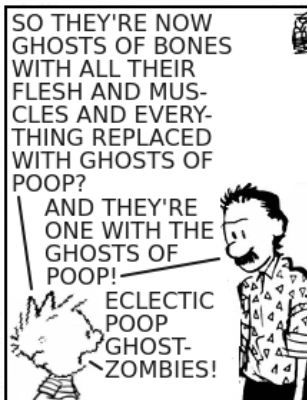
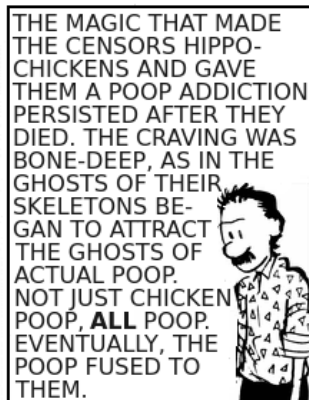
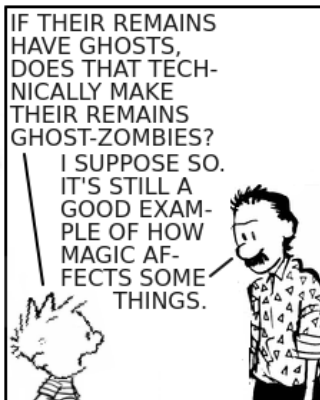
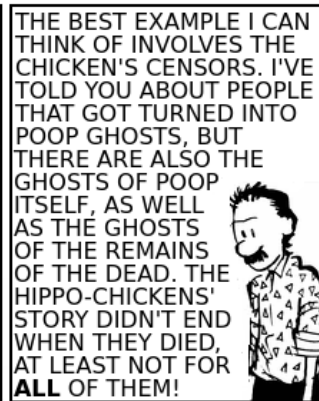
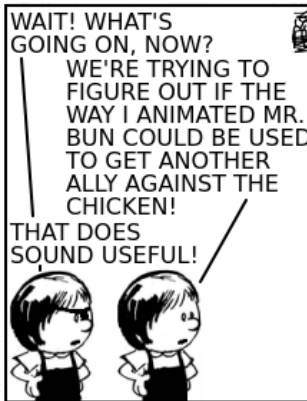
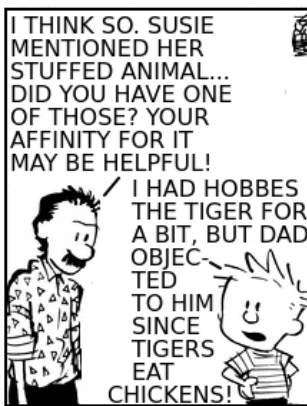
YOU MEAN AFTER YOUR LAST VISIT? NO. HE TOLERATES IT, BUT HE'S SAID THAT I'LL HAVE TO GIVE IT UP WHEN I'M OLDER, AS PART OF MY "PUTTING AWAY CHILDISH THINGS."

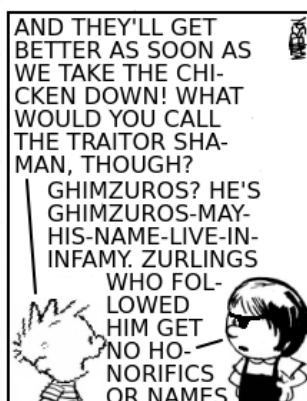
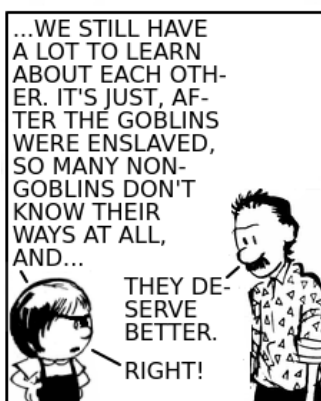
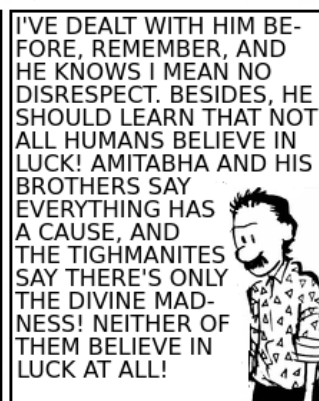
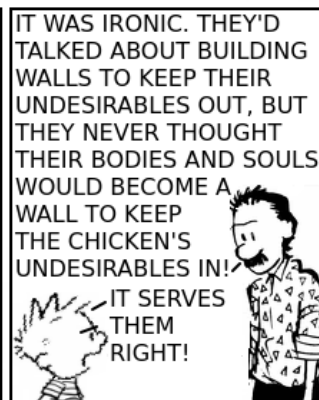
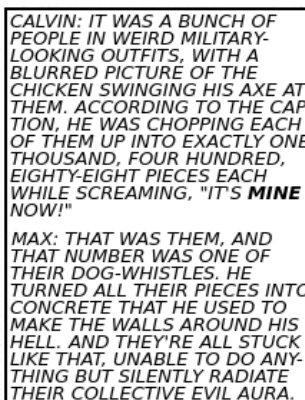
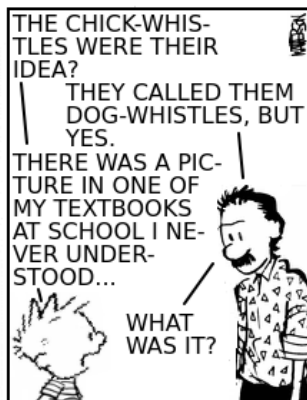
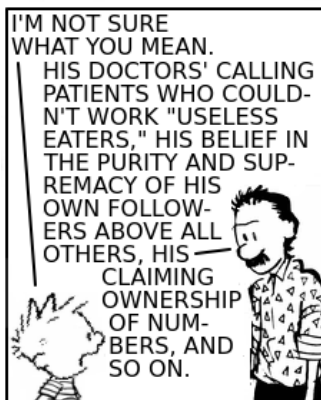
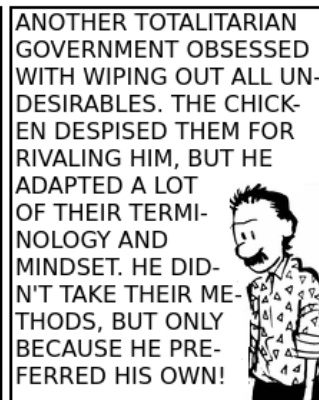
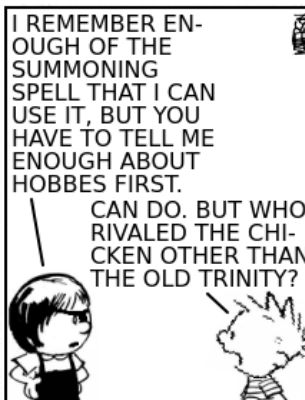
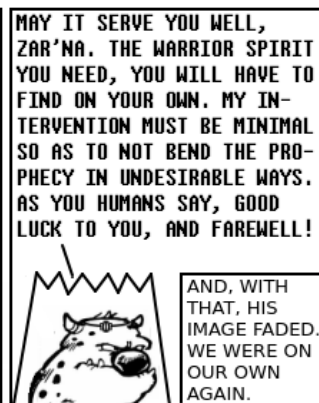
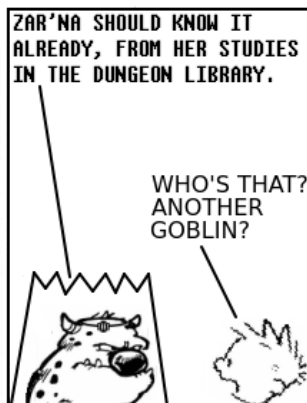
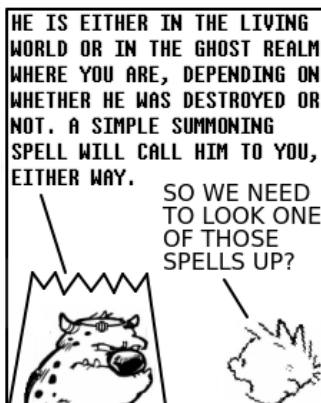
ONLY BECAUSE HE DOESN'T SEE YOU AS BREEDING STOCK!

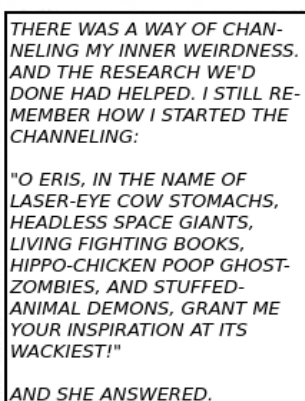
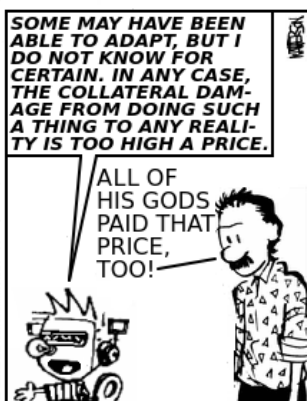
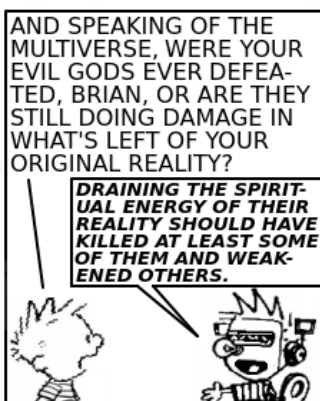
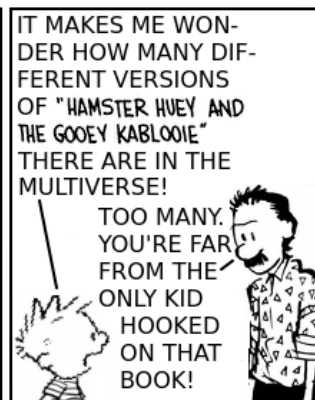
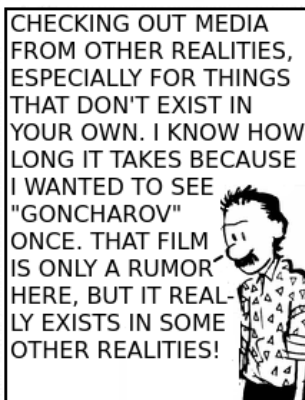
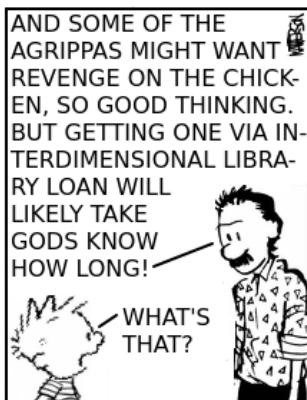
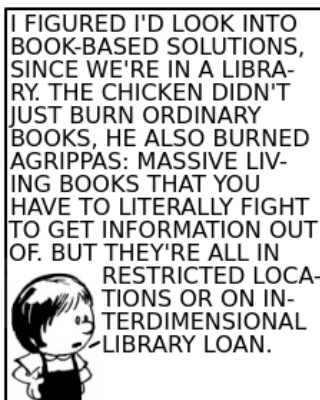
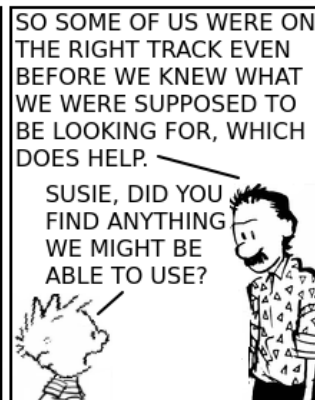
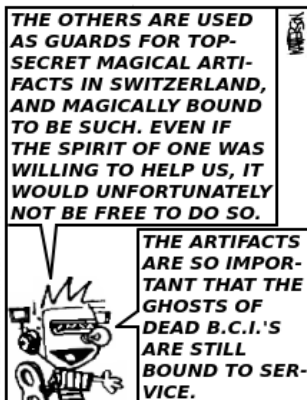
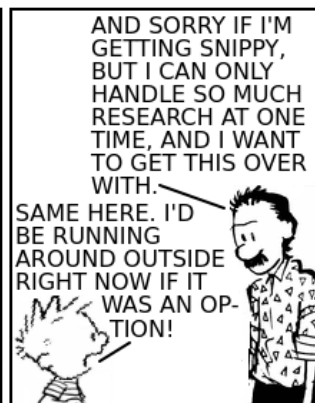
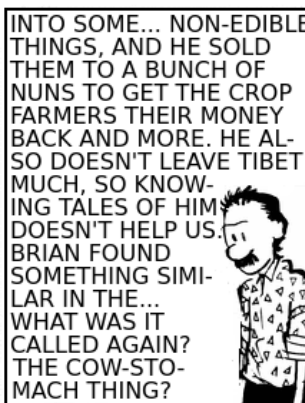
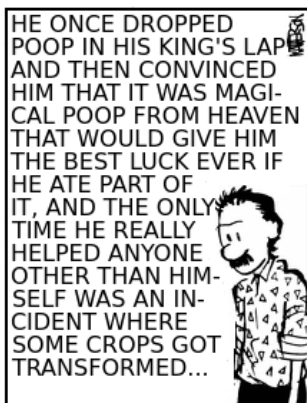
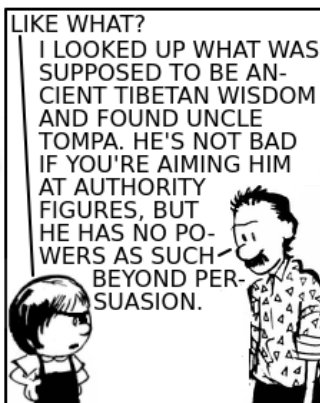


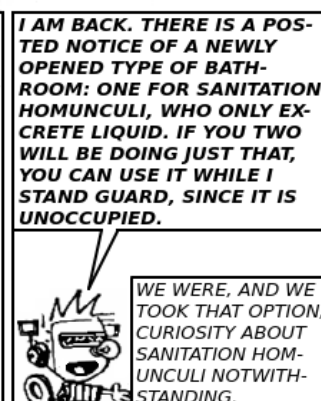
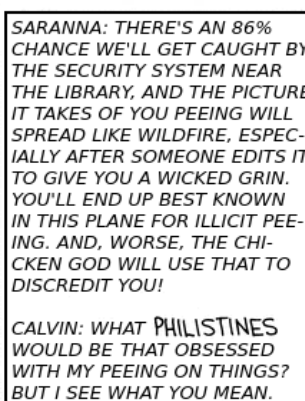
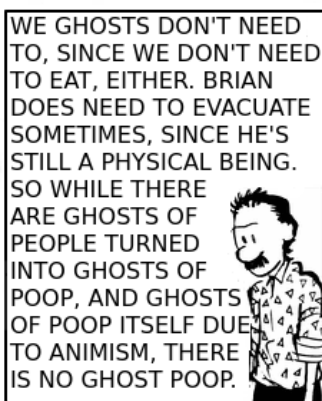
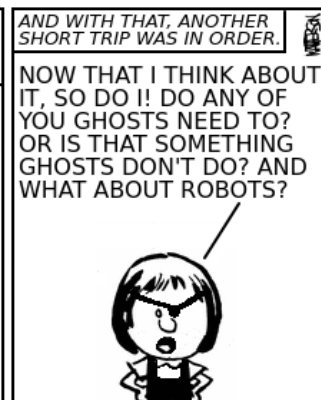
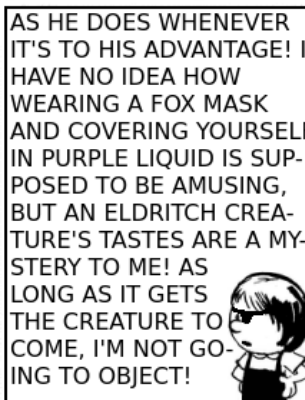
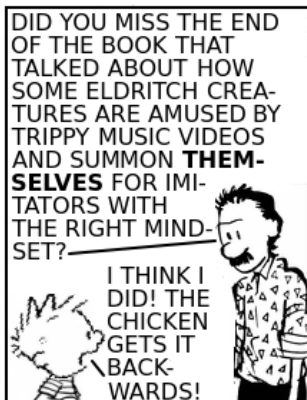
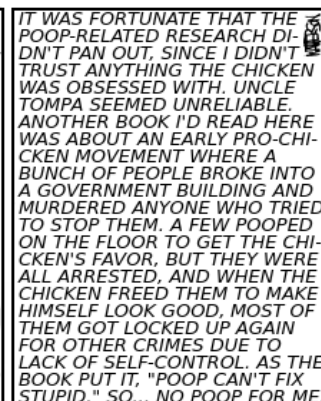
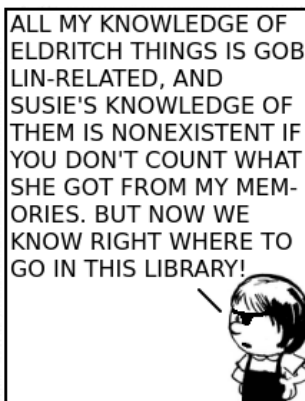
BUT TO GET BACK TO THE ISSUE AT HAND, SUSIE DOES HAVE A GOOD POINT. I SHOULD HAVE MENTIONED IT EARLIER, BUT I HAD SO MUCH TO TELL ALREADY! IMAGINATION AND MAGIC COMBINED ARE THE KEY TO THE KIND OF ANIMISM THAT MAY WELL BE WHAT THE ANIMUS NEEDS.











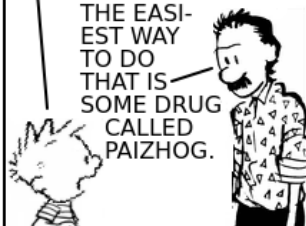
AFTER GETTING BACK TO UNCLE MAX AND SUSIE, WE HEADED TO AN AVAILABLE EMPTY ROOM AND PUT UP A "DO NOT DISTURB" SIGN. THEN IT WAS A MATTER OF GETTING THE RIGHT MINDSET...

I THINK I HAVE MY NOTES MEMORIZED BY NOW! SO WHAT DO I NEED TO DO BEFORE WE START THIS?

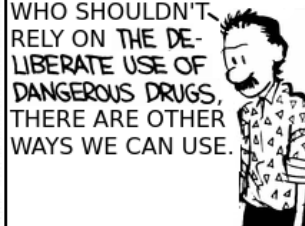


BEFORE SUMMONING HOBBS FIRST, I MEAN.

MY NOTES SAY YOU NEED TO GET IN THE RIGHT STATE OF MIND. THE EASIEST WAY TO DO THAT IS SOME DRUG CALLED PAIZHOG.

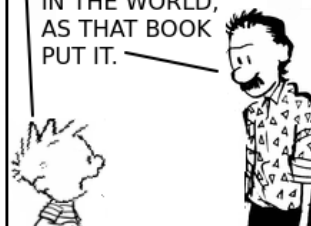


BUT SINCE I KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THE STUFF OTHER THAN IT'S SOME KIND OF HALLUCINOGEN FROM ANOTHER REALITY, AND YOU'RE JUST A KID WHO SHOULDN'T RELY ON THE DELIBERATE USE OF DANGEROUS DRUGS, THERE ARE OTHER WAYS WE CAN USE.



LIKE WHAT?

SPINNING IN PLACE IN THE RIGHT WAY UNTIL YOU'RE "OPEN TO THE MYSTICISM INHERENT IN THE WORLD," AS THAT BOOK PUT IT.



ACCORDING TO ERIS, I'M FORBIDDEN TO BELIEVE WHAT I READ. INSTEAD, I SHOULD BELIEVE THINGS AFTER TESTING THEM. THIS WAS AS GOOD A TIME AS ANY TO DO THAT.



THERE WAS AN ALMOST IMPERCEPTIBLE SHIFT AROUND ME. I HEARD UNCLE MAX WHISPERING A PRAYER TO EBVOOT, AND MY TRUE JOURNEY BEGAN.

WHEEE! HA HA HA!



EBVOOT MAY HAVE BEEN A GOD OF SMALL FAVORS, BUT MAKING SURE THIS WORKED WAS A BIG ONE.

SO WITH SPIRITS, SO WITH SOLIDS! NOTHING IS TRULY LOST!



NEUGA, ZIENA, ZIEBER, ZOM! RETURN TO ME WITH GREAT APLOMB! HOBBS, I SUMMON THEE! COME FORTH!



THE WORDS HAD BEEN SPOKEN. NOW FOR THE DANCE. (WITH ENOUGH SKILL, IMAGINING THE STEPS OF THE RITUAL WOULD PRODUCE THE SAME RESULT AS PHYSICALLY DOING THEM, BUT I WOULDN'T HAVE THAT LEVEL OF SKILL FOR A FEW YEARS.)



AND THEN WE WAITED FOR THE MAGIC TO BEGIN.

I WISH MY COUSIN HADN'T BANNED ME FROM HAVING ANY STUFFED ANIMALS!

I KNOW! YOU CAN AT LEAST MAKE UP FOR LOST TIME!



REALITY SEEMED TO WAVER, JUST LIKE IT HAD WHEN THE GOBLINS WERE OPENING A PORTAL TO THE GHOST PLANE. THEN, SUDDENLY, THERE WAS AN ORANGE FLASH...



YOUR SPELL WORKED!

THANK YOU THANK YOU THANKYOU THANKYOU THANKYOU THANKYOU THANKYOU THANKYOU



CALVIN! IT'S BEEN SO LONG! HOW MANY ADVENTURES HAVE YOU HAD?



A LOT FEWER THAN I'D LIKE! BUT YOU'RE FINALLY BACK!

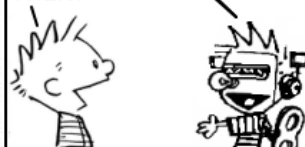
AND SOON, EVERYONE ELSE SHOULD BE ABLE TO SEE YOU, TOO! THE REAL YOU!

I'M CURIOUS ABOUT THAT MYSELF!



AS AM I! SUCH AN ILLOGICAL THING IS FASCINATING, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE IT WORKS!

LET'S DO MORE ILLOGIC, THEN!



ALTHOUGH THE ELDRITCH SUMMONING RITUAL WILL MAKE ENOUGH OF A MESS THAT IT MIGHT BE A PROBLEM TO DO IT HERE! HMMM...



THERE ARE SOME CHANGES WE CAN MAKE TO THE SECOND RITUAL, JUST AS WE DID WITH THE FIRST ONE.

THAT'S GOOD TO KNOW!

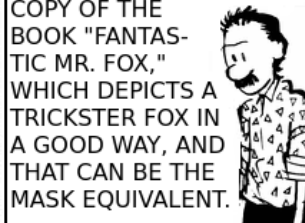


SINCE WHEN DO YOU CARE ABOUT MAKING A MESS, OR FOLLOWING RULES ABOUT THEM?

AFTER DOING THIS SUCCESSFULLY ONCE, I DON'T WANT TO GET KICKED OUT BEFORE I CAN DO IT AGAIN!

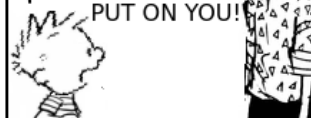


BRIAN SCANNED AN IMAGE OF A PURPLE LAVA LAMP WHILE RESEARCHING, WHICH WE CAN DISPLAY FOR THE PURPLE LIQUID PART. THERE'S A COPY OF THE BOOK "FANTASTIC MR. FOX," WHICH DEPICTS A TRICKSTER FOX IN A GOOD WAY, AND THAT CAN BE THE MASK EQUIVALENT.



WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF IT?

THE HUMAN SKULL MASK AND CHAINS? YOU'RE WEARING A HUMAN SKULL MASK COVERED IN SKIN, AND YOU WEAR CHAINS THE CHICKEN PUT ON YOU!



I SHOULD HAVE BEEN CONFIDENT, SEEING AS HOW I'D JUST SUCCESSFULLY DONE MAGIC, BUT I HAD A FEW MOMENTS OF DOUBT.



THIS RITUAL WAS MUCH MORE COMPLEX, AND REQUIRED MAKING A DEAL WITH WHATEVER ELDRITCH ENTITY WAS WILLING TO HELP.

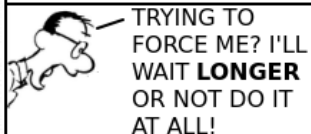
WHAT KIND OF LOON CAME UP WITH THE MUSIC VIDEO THAT INSPIRED THE RITUAL? AND WHAT PROOF DID I HAVE THAT IT WOULD WORK THE SAME WAY?

AND AS FOR MAKING DEALS, I KNEW FROM EXPERIENCE WITH DAD (AND, TO A LESSER EXTENT, MOM) HOW THOSE WORKED.

DAD WOULD FIRST SAY HE'D DO SOMETHING, BUT HE'D PUT IT OFF.



THEN HE'D TREAT IT AS LEVERAGE. IF I BROUGHT UP THAT HE SAID HE'D DO IT BY A CERTAIN TIME THAT WAS GETTING AWFULLY CLOSE...



TRYING TO FORCE ME? I'LL WAIT LONGER OR NOT DO IT AT ALL!

AND THEN IF HE GOT ANGRY ENOUGH (HE'D CALL IT "BEING PASSIONATE" AND A GOOD THING WHEN HE DID IT, AND CALL IT "HAVING AN ATTITUDE" AND A BAD THING IF I EVER DID IT), HE'D DROP ALL PRETENSE.



AND IF I DID EVERYTHING TO AVOID SETTING HIM OFF, AND HE JUST HAPPENED TO BE IN A BAD MOOD THAT DAY, HE'D JUMP STRAIGHT TO THAT LAST STAGE, REGARDLESS.

HOW MANY OTHERS WITH AUTHORITY WOULD ACT THE SAME WAY?

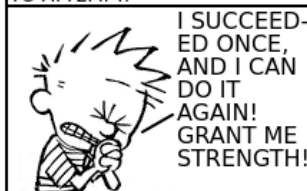
AND MOM'S VERSION OF ALL THAT WAS "IF YOU ASK FOR IT, YOU DON'T GET IT." AFTER WHICH SHE'D JUMP TO THE LAST STAGE, TOO. BOTH OF THEM THOUGHT THEY HAD NO OBLIGATIONS, ONLY LEVERAGE, EXCEPT WHEN PEOPLE WITH AUTHORITY OVER THEM MADE THEM MEET THEIR OBLIGATIONS. UNCLE MAX'S STORY OF THE FIRST LIBERTY TOWN WAS THE SAME BEHAVIOR WRIT LARGE.



CHEATED AGAIN!

THE THREAT OF FINANCIAL RUIN WAS ONE THING THAT KEPT THEM IN LINE SOMEWHAT. THEY NEVER COMPLAINED ABOUT CAPITALISM, THOUGH, TO DO SO WAS ANTI-CHICKEN. BECAUSE HE FAVORED THE RICH SO MUCH. BUT I'D OVERHEARD A FEW PEOPLE DO IT WHEN THEY THOUGHT I WASN'T LISTENING. THE QUESTION REMAINED: HOW MANY WERE TRULY ON MY SIDE, AND HOW MANY WERE ONLY PRETENDING DUE TO SOME THREAT TO THEM OR SOME PRESSURE ON THEM? I'D FOUND SOME NEW FRIENDS, BUT HOW MANY WERE ACTUALLY FRIENDS? THE SAME APPLIED TO WHOEVER OR WHATEVER I CHOSE TO SUMMON.

NO... I NEEDED TO BE BRAVE ENOUGH TO AT LEAST TRY. AND IT WASN'T FAIR TO CALL ANYONE A LOON, BECAUSE MAGIC WAS CRAZY BY DEFINITION, AND IT WAS SUPREMELY INSULTING TO CALL ANYONE A BIRD NAME, GIVEN WHO OUR ENEMIES WERE. THERE WERE EVEN CRAZIER RITUALS OUT THERE THAN THIS ONE I WAS ABOUT TO ATTEMPT.



I SUCCEEDED ONCE, AND I CAN DO IT AGAIN! GRANT ME STRENGTH!

I LEARNED SOME OF THEM YEARS LATER FROM AUNT WALBURGA'S ADOPTIVE NEPHEW JON.



AUNT WALBURGA! HENCE, I AM GOING TO TAP DANCE ON THE FRONT LAWN IN MY UNDERWEAR WITH A BALLOON ANIMAL TIED TO MY HEAD AND A PINEAPPLE IN EACH HAND! AND THEN I WILL CONNECT ALL THE SPLATTERED BUGS ON MY CAR WINDSHIELD TO MAKE A PICTURE! AND FWOOBSLARK WILL APPEAR!

FROM POSING NEAR TEN DEAD OCTOPUSES TO RITUALLY "SERVING THE TOILET WITH THE LIBATION OF MY DEFECATION" (THE LATTER ONLY ONCE I OVERCAME MY LUMBERCHICKEN-INDUCED AVERSION TO POOP), THERE WERE SO MANY RITUALS I LEARNED AND DID. AND THIS WAS ONLY THE SECOND ONE. I JUST HAD TO GET OUT OF MY HEAD AND ACTUALLY DO IT.



I DON'T REMEMBER WHO I WAS ASKING FOR STRENGTH. MY NON-CHICKENIST FAMILY, SUSIE AND SARANNA, ANY AND ALL OF THE ENTITIES I'D WORKED WITH (MAYBE AMITABHA-OR-AMITAYUS WOULD MAKE AN EXCEPTION TO HIS USUAL PACIFISM, GIVEN THE MASSIVE AMOUNTS OF HARM THE CHICKEN AND HIS AGENTS WERE DOING?), BUT IT WORKED.



CALVIN? CALVIN! ...I'M READY NOW!

I JUST NEEDED A MINUTE TO PSYCH MYSELF UP AGAIN.



GOOD, BECAUSE WE'RE ALL READY TO SUPPORT YOU!

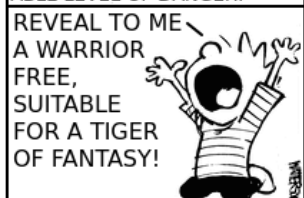
MY BEST FRIEND WOULD SOON BE VISIBLE TO EVERYONE, HE'D GET ENOUGH POWER TO HELP PUT AN END TO THE CHICKEN, AND THEN MAYBE WE COULD ALL JUST LIVE OUR LIVES NORMALLY AGAIN. OR AT LEAST FOR A WHILE.



I'M HERE TO SUPPORT YOU, TOO! I WISH I HADN'T BEEN AWAY SO LONG!

THAT WAS THE MOST REASSURING OF ALL!

AND WITH THAT, I BEGAN. THERE WAS STILL DANGER (I'D ONLY REACHED OUT TO THE FLYING SPAGHETTI MONSTER BECAUSE HE COULDN'T RANDOMLY TURN MY FOOD INTO PASTA IF I WERE DEAD AT THE CHICKEN'S HANDS), BUT ALL THE RESEARCH WE'D DONE SAID IT WOULD BE A REASONABLE LEVEL OF DANGER.



REVEAL TO ME A WARRIOR FREE, SUITABLE FOR A TIGER OF FANTASY!

IT WAS SUPPOSED TO SUMMON A COMPATIBLE SPIRIT, WITHOUT SPECIFYING WHO IT WAS. THE NAMED ONES ALL SEEMED TO HAVE MAJOR PROBLEMS. TAKE "SOLEGO THE CHAOS GOD, IMMORTAL MASTER OF THE WORLD." HE DIDN'T SOUND LIKE HE USED CREATIVE CHAOS AT ALL, AND FOR A SO-CALLED MASTER OF THE WORLD, HE WASN'T ACTUALLY RULING IT, SO HE OBVIOUSLY HAD SOME MAJOR WEAKNESS STOPPING HIM FROM DOING SO. **THIS** RITUAL WAS NO MICKEY MOUSE OPERATION.

REALITY WAVERED AGAIN, AS IT HAD WHEN I'D SUMMONED HOBBS, AND A CREATURE LOOKING LIKE A BLOB WITH A TOOTHY EYEBALL AND HORNS APPEARED.

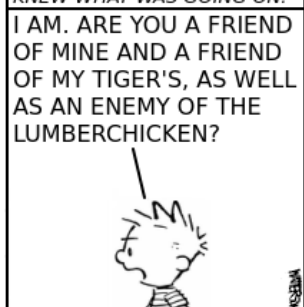


IT SPOKE TELEPATHICALLY TO ME.

GREETINGS. YOU ARE THE PROPHECIED ONE, OR SO I HEAR.



I ANSWERED TELEPATHICALLY, BUT ALSO SPOKE MY WORDS OUT LOUD SO THE OTHERS KNEW WHAT WAS GOING ON.



I AM. ARE YOU A FRIEND OF MINE AND A FRIEND OF MY TIGER'S, AS WELL AS AN ENEMY OF THE LUMBERCHICKEN?

I CAN BE. THAT GOBLIN IS NOT THE ONLY ONE WATCHING YOU.



AND BOTH THE GOBLINS AND MY KIND ARE ENSLAVED BY THE CHICKEN.




I BROKE MY BONDS BY TAPPING INTO ELDRITCH POWER. YOU ARE DOING THE SAME NOW.



I REPEATED ITS HALF OF THE CONVERSATION FOR EVERYONE ELSE, AND THEN I CONTINUED.


WHAT'S YOUR NAME? I'M CALVIN, A HUMAN WHO'S TIRED OF BEING RULED BY AN EVIL GOD WHO ANSWERS TO NO ONE!



I'M ZHUPARR, A DEMON TIRED OF THE SAME AND CURIOUS ABOUT OTHER PERSPECTIVES!




AND I'M HOBBS, A TIGER WHO WANTS TO BE ABLE TO DO MORE IN THIS WORLD, BOTH FOR MY BEST FRIEND AND OTHERS! YOU CAN SEE ME THE WAY CALVIN DOES, SO YOU CAN MAKE OTHERS DO IT TOO!



I'VE ALWAYS LIKED THE COLOR ORANGE! LET US JOIN FORCES!



BEFORE WE DO THAT, WHAT DO YOU MEAN THAT THERE ARE OTHERS WATCHING ME?



IT'LL BE FASTER IF I SHOW YOU. YOUR OTHER FRIEND WITH THE EYE CAN VERIFY IT.



THE VISION IT SHOWED ME WAS HORRIFYING.


WHY HAVE WE DEMONS BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO WORMS?

I'M TIRED OF KILLING PEOPLE MYSELF! YOU WILL BE WORM COMMUNION FOR MY NEW AGENTS!




AFTER THE CHICKEN TURNED THE BIG FOUR DOCTORS INTO POOP GHOSTS AND TOOK OVER THEIR DUTIES FOR AWHILE, HE DECIDED HE HAD BETTER THINGS TO DO AND DELEGATED HIS AUTHORITY TO KEEP HIS REPLACEMENT MASS MURDERERS FROM TURNING ON HIM, HE HAD THEM EAT DEMONS THAT HE'D TURNED INTO WORMS AND MIND-CONTROLLED: THE VAST MAJORITY OF ZHUPARR'S PEOPLE.

TAKE, EAT! THIS IS MY POWER OF SACRED HARM WHICH IS GIVEN TO YOU! DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME AND WHAT I CAN DO TO YOU IF YOU USE IT AGAINST MY INTEREST IN ANY WAY!



MY LAST HEALERS TURNED ON ME, BUT YOU WILL NOT! WORMS: EAT A BIT OF MY NEW AGENTS' BRAINS! IF THEY TURN ON ME, EAT ALL OF THEIR BRAINS! AGENTS: YOUR TASK IS TO CHANGE ALL REPROBATE PEOPLE FROM BEING ALIVE PEOPLE TO BEING DEAD PEOPLE, TO PURIFY MY WORLD! IF YOU CAN CAUSE EXTRA PAIN IN THE PROCESS, THEN ALWAYS DO SO! AND DO NOT FAIL ME!




I RAN THIS BY THE OTHERS, AND BOTH UNCLE MAX AND SARANNA CONFIRMED IT.

I KNEW ABOUT HIS DELEGATING HEALTH CARE TO NEW PEOPLE, BECAUSE HE'S GOTTEN LAZY! I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE WORMS, BUT IT FITS HIS NEW PEOPLE'S ERRATIC BEHAVIOR!



AFTER LEARNING ABOUT THE CHICKEN'S MASS SLAUGHTER AFTER QUADPOOP DAY, I DID NOTICE SOME ODD COMMENTS ABOUT WORMS, BUT I DIDN'T LOOK AT IT IN MORE DETAIL UNTIL NOW! SO A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE GETTING LOCKED UP, TORTURED, AND KILLED AT THE BEHEST OF PEOPLE WITH WORM-EATEN BRAINS?!



AND ENSLAVED WORMS AT THAT?! WHY DOESN'T HE JUST USE BRAIN-WASHED AGENTS AS HEALERS? NOT THAT THAT'S ANY BETTER!

ACCORDING TO SPIES, IT'S ONE OF HIS QUIRKS: HE INSISTS THAT ALL HARM DONE IN HIS NAME MUST BE FREELY DONE!




THAT IS ONLY THE FIRST PART. THERE IS STILL MORE.




THE VISION CONTINUED, FOCUSING ON SEVERAL OF THE WORMS WHO ESCAPED THE FULL GROUP WHILE THE CHICKEN GLOATED, AND THEN ON ONE IN PARTICULAR. THAT WAS ZHUPARR.

THAT CHICKEN DOESN'T HAVE A CLEW, OR AT LEAST NOT A FULL ONE! THE OTHERS ARE GOING THEIR OWN WAYS... WHAT IS THAT I SENSE?



ZHUPARR WAS APPARENTLY A PUNSTER (AS A CLEW WAS A GROUP OF WORMS), BUT ALSO HAD THE SAME KIND OF SPIRITUAL SENSITIVITY THAT I DID. IT'D MADE A DEAL WITH "THE NAMELESS NAME," GOD OF OBSCURE PRONOUNS, TO GET OUT OF WORM FORM AND GAIN SOME POWER BACK. AND WHEN MY SENSES WERE GOING CRAZY DUE TO THE GOBLINS' OPENING THE PORTAL TO THE GHOST REALM, ZHUPARR'S WERE TOO: THAT "ALMOST TIME..." WAS IT SPEAKING. AND THE PORTAL ATTRACTED THE ATTENTION OF A FEW OTHERS.


A GOD OF OBSCURE PRONOUNS COULD DO THAT? I GUESS "THE NAMELESS NAME" REALLY HOLDS A GRUDGE AGAINST THE CHICKEN FOR HIS PRONOUN ABOLITION MONTH!




HE ABOLISHED PRONOUNS FOR A MONTH?




CALVIN: I HAVE NO IDEA WHY. DAD WAS ALL, "THE HOLY LUMBERCHICKEN SAYS THAT THE HOLY LUMBERCHICKEN WILL PUNISH ALL WHO REFER TO THE HOLY LUMBERCHICKEN BY ANYTHING OTHER THAN THE HOLY LUMBERCHICKEN'S FULL TITLE! AND DAD WILL PUNISH CALVIN MORE FOR BOTH BETRAYING THE HOLY LUMBERCHICKEN AND CALVIN'S FATHER!" AND THEN THE CHICKEN DROPPED IT A MONTH LATER. NOW HE USES PRONOUNS, BUT PRETENDS HE DOESN'T IF ANYONE BRINGS IT UP.



IT WAS ALL A MOUTHFUL. I COULD UNDERSTAND TITLES, SINCE NO ONE PAID MUCH ATTENTION WHEN I DECIDED I'D CHANGE TO "CALVIN THE BOLD," BUT BANNING AN ENTIRE PART OF SPEECH?



MY PRONOUNS ARE A SACRED MYSTERY. THEY ARE POWERFUL.



WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? I'VE BEEN THINKING OF YOU AS "IT" BECAUSE I DIDN'T KNOW BETTER, AND YOU DIDN'T CORRECT ME! IS "THE NAMELESS NAME" GOING TO BE AFTER ME NOW?



RELAX. YOU DIDN'T KNOW, AND NEITHER I NOR MY GOD ARE SO EASILY OFFENDED.



IT/ITS WORKS, BECAUSE MY TRUE PRONOUNS ARE SACRED AND WILL LIGHT YOUR DARKEST HOUR!



I REMEMBER THE BACKLASH FROM PRONOUN ABOLITION MONTH! SOME PEOPLE STARTED USING "PRONOUN" AS A SWEAR WORD, LIKE "PRONOUN YOU, YOU PRONOUNING PRONOUNER!" ALTHOUGH IT WAS NEVER COMMON ENOUGH TO HAVE A COMMANDMENT AGAINST IT.



FASCINATING. I WAS BUSY LEARNING THE POWER OF SIX AT THAT TIME.

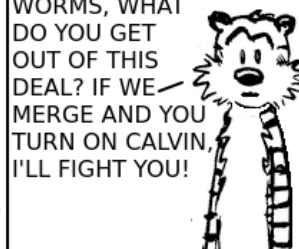


AFTER ANOTHER BREAK TO TELL THE OTHERS ZHUPARR'S HALF OF THE CONVERSATION (TELEPATHY WAS COOL, BUT IT WAS GIVING ME A HEADACHE), I TURNED THINGS OVER TO HOBBS.

WHY WOULD YOU HELP US? CALVIN HAS DEFINITELY LEARNED SOME NEW TRICKS SINCE I WAS LOST TO HIM...



...BUT ASIDE FROM CURIOSITY AND VENGEANCE AGAINST THE CHICKEN FOR TURNING YOU AND YOUR PEOPLE INTO WORMS, WHAT DO YOU GET OUT OF THIS DEAL? IF WE MERGE AND YOU TURN ON CALVIN, I'LL FIGHT YOU!



I'VE NEVER BEEN FRIENDS WITH MORTALS BEFORE. I'D LIKE TO BE!



AND A MALE TIGER FORM IS MOST INTERESTING COMPARED TO WHAT I AM!



AS FLATTERED AS I AM BY THAT, WHY? IS THAT AMOEBA FORM YOUR NATURAL ONE? AND WHY DOES YOUR RITUAL REQUIRE PURPLE LIQUID IF YOU REALLY LIKE THE COLOR ORANGE?



ZHUPARR: I AM AN AMOEBA DEMON, BUT THE TEETH AND HORNS WERE CHANGES WROUGHT BY MY ELDRITCH POWER. AND OF ALL THE WEIRDNESS HERE, YOU OBJECT TO MY HAVING MORE THAN ONE FAVORITE COLOR? I LIKE PURPLE, ORANGE, AND ONE COLOR I'VE ONLY BEEN ABLE TO SEE SINCE MY ELDRITCH TRANSFORMATION: GLEMZARIC. IT IS BEYOND THE SIGHT OF MOST. MAYBE YOUR ROBOT FRIEND CAN RECALIBRATE HIS VISION IN ORDER TO SEE IT? BESIDES, I'LL BE ABLE TO DO ONE VERY IMPORTANT THING AS A TIGER.

HOBBS: WHAT'S THAT?

ZHUPARR: WEAR HATS THAT BREAK THE CHICKEN'S MANY COMMANDMENTS!

NOBODY WEARS SOMBREROS? WHAT FUN IS IT BEING "COOL" IF YOU CAN'T WEAR A SOMBRERO?



I SUDDENLY HAD A FLASHBACK TO ONE OF HOBBS' AND MY FIGHTS.

AND THAT LED TO ANOTHER FLASHBACK A FEW YEARS LATER.

THERE'S A COMMANDMENT 32748 BANNING WEARING SOMBREROS? MAYBE THEY'RE COOLER THAN I THOUGHT! AND COMMANDMENT 32749 BANS WEARING NEON MAGENTA SOMBREROS WITH GOOGLY EYES? WHAT'S UP WITH THAT?



I CAN SEE IT IN YOUR MIND! I'LL FINALLY GET TO WEAR A SOMBRERO!



I SHUDDERED AT THE THOUGHT OF THE CHICKEN'S HAVING MORE SLAVES. THE CHICKEN-BRAINWASHED BUTT-PEOPLE, THE BUTT-VICEROY-BRAINWASHED ORDINARY PEOPLE, THE CAVE GOBLINS, THE GUN GNOMES (WILLING SLAVES COUNTED), THE AMOEBA DEMONS-TURNED-BRAIN-EATING WORMS, POSSIBLY SOME OF THE ORCS THAT SARANNA HAD TALKED ABOUT (AFTER SEEING THE ONE IN THE RESTAURANT, I THOUGHT I'D SEEN AT LEAST ONE IN THE DUNGEON, BUT THEY DIDN'T EAT WITH US FOR WHATEVER REASON)... THERE WERE JUST TOO MANY. BUT THIS DEAL TO KEEP THE CHICKEN FROM MAKING MORE SEEMED FITTING, AND HOBBS APPROVED IT.

THIS WARRIOR AGAINST THE CHICKEN HAD SOME ODD REASONING, BUT HE SHOWED PROMISE. I ONLY HAD ONE MORE QUESTION.

HOBBS AND I BOTH AGREE. YOU CAN WEAR ALL THE CHICKEN-DEFYING HEADWEAR YOU LIKE. BUT WHAT IS THIS POWER OF SIX YOU'VE TALKED ABOUT? IS IT RELATED TO YOUR SECRET PRONOUNS?



NO, IT'S A SEPARATE THING. LET ME TRY TO SHOW YOU WHAT IT IS...



THE OTHERS WATCHED...

WHILE WE'RE WAITING TO HEAR THE NEXT PART OF THE DEAL, DOES ANYONE HAVE ANYTHING INTERESTING TO TALK ABOUT?



I CHECKED THE MOST RECENT LIST OF COMMANDMENTS. THE ONE YOU MENTIONED ABOUT NOT CHANGING THE LYRICS TO CHICK-MASS CAROLS FOR FUN IS 69419. THE ONE RIGHT AFTER IT, 69420, BANS BLEEPING OUT RANDOM WORDS IN SONGS TO MAKE THEM SOUND MORE OBSCENE.



HUH! I BROKE THAT SECOND ONE IN HIGH SCHOOL MUSIC CLASS WHEN WE WATCHED "THE KING AND I," WITH THAT "WHENEVER I FEEL AFRAID" SONG! "WHENEVER I FEEL *BLEEP*, I HOLD MY *BLEEP* ERECT..."



MY COUSIN WOULD COMPLAIN IF ANYONE TALKED ABOUT ERECTING THINGS OR ERECTIONS, SAYING IT WAS INDECENT. I DON'T KNOW WHY SHE HAD SUCH A PROBLEM WITH BUILDINGS, THOUGH!



ALL THE COMMANDMENTS YOU HAD TO DEAL WITH CONSTANTLY ARE RIDICULOUS! ONE OF THE FEW I HAD TO DEAL WITH WAS 79521, WHICH SAYS THE NAME SHIRI IS ONLY FOR FEMALE BUTT-PEOPLE SERVING THE HOLY LUMBERCHICKEN! (ONE OF MY CLASSMATES HAD A BABY SISTER.)



THAT IS IN COMMANDMENTS 79487 THROUGH 79715, ALL DEVOTED TO USAGE AND SPELLING OF NAMES. OTHERS IN IT INCLUDE 79647, WHICH BANS THE SPELLING OF "MISSY" AS "MYSSIE," AND A NON-SEQUENTIAL BAN ON TWENTY-THREE DIFFERENT SPELLINGS OF "DARYL."



I DIDN'T KNOW YOU COULD SPELL IT THAT MANY WAYS! AS FOR BUTT-PEOPLE NAMES, I KNOW THEY BREED TRUE, SOMEHOW, BUT HOW MANY OF THEM ARE THERE NOW? ...WAIT, CALVIN'S STIRRING AGAIN, AND HE LOOKS LIKE HE HAS QUESTIONS FOR US!



ZHUPARR SHOWED ME A VISION DEMONSTRATING ITS POWERS, SINCE WE CAN'T VERY WELL SHOW THEM OFF IN A LIBRARY. THEY LOOK GOOD, BUT... DOES ANYONE KNOW WHAT DYNAMIC ELEMENTAL INCURSION IS, JUST SO I UNDERSTAND IT?



SHAMAN GHEFZARAL MENTIONED IT ONCE WHEN HE WAS TELLING ME ABOUT ADVANCED MAGICAL TECHNIQUES. IT'S TAPPING INTO MULTIPLE GROUPS OF MAGICAL ELEMENTS AT ONCE, INSTEAD OF BEING LIMITED TO ONLY ONE GROUP OF THEM.



OKAY, NOW I GET IT! ZHUPARR TALKED ABOUT THE INDO-EUROPEAN ELEMENTS, THE CHINESE ELEMENTS, AND THE DISCORDIAN ELEMENTS, AND WHAT IT SHOWED ME LINES UP WITH ITS PULLING FROM ALL THREE OF THEM!



INDO-EUROPEAN IS EARTH, WATER, FIRE, AIR, AND ETHER OR VOID. CHINESE IS EARTH, WATER, FIRE, WOOD, AND METAL. I FORGET THE DISCORDIAN.

SWEET, BOOM, PUNGENT, PRICKLE, AND ORANGE!



THE POWER OF SIX THAT ZHUPARR SAYS IT HAS IS THE USE OF TWO ELEMENTS EACH FROM THOSE THREE GROUPS: AIR AND VOID, WOOD AND METAL, AND BOOM AND PRICKLE! IT CAN SPAWN OR CONTROL THEM!



SO IT'S LIKE REPLICANT! A ROBOT FROM THAT MOVIE I WASN'T ALLOWED TO WATCH?

NO, THE COMIC CHARACTER! THE ONE-ROGUE ARMY! TONY GAMBİ WITH ALL THE POWERS OF HIS COOL UNCLE'S THE FLASH ROGUES!



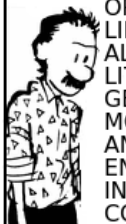
WELL, EXCEPT FOR THE PART WHERE HE WENT CRAZY, AND WITHOUT HIS TECHNICALLY BEING ON THE SIDE OF THE VILLAINS! BUT ACCORDING TO THE CHICKEN, WE'RE ALL VILLAINS ANYWAY FOR OPPOSING HIM!



ZHUPARR WANTED TO USE ORANGE AS ONE OF ITS DISCORDIAN ELEMENTS, BUT... IS IT TRUE THAT THERE WAS A PRO-CHICKEN POLITICAL MOVEMENT THAT TRIED TO CLAIM THE COLOR ORANGE AS ITS OWN?



YES, BUT IT WAS BRIEF. AND THE COLOR ALWAYS LOOKED MORE GOLDEN BROWN TO ME ANYWAY. THEY WERE ALSO OBSESSED WITH THEIR ENEMIES' BEING AWAKE, OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT? ONE ALTERNATE REALITY HAD THEM GET AHOOLD OF A MONKEY'S PAW AND WISH THE ENTIRE PLANET INTO A MASS COMA!



THAT'S WHY, THEN! ZHUPARR LOOKED INTO THE INDANTHRENE HERESY BRANCH OF DISCORDIANISM, WHERE THE ORANGE ELEMENT WAS REPLACED WITH BLUE, AND THE SETTING ORANGE DAY OF THE WEEK WAS REPLACED WITH RISING BLUEBERRY, BUT THE BLUEBERRY-BASED POWERS DIDN'T THRILL IT.



BY THE TIME THAT GROUP STOPPED HIJACKING ORANGE, IT'D ALREADY GONE WITH BOOM TO BLOW THINGS UP INSTEAD OF ORANGE TO BIND PEOPLE WITH GI-GANTIC ORANGE PEELS.



AND NOW THAT IT'S ALL CLEARED UP, ZHUPARR AND HOBBS CAN PUT THEIR HEADS TOGETHER! LET'S SEE HOW THIS STUFF REALLY WORKS!



WE ARE ONE!



WE ARE ONE!



W H O A! THIS BODY OF OURS... MINE IS SO DIFFERENT! AND YET IT FITS!




THIS DEAL WAS ONLY MY FIRST, BUT IT WAS THE START OF A MUCH BIGGER THING! I HAD A NEW TITLE NOW!

I'LL HAVE TO HIDE MY DEMONIC NATURE FOR NOW! CALL ME ZHUPARR-HOBBS... OR SUPER-HOBBS!


EVERYONE, MEET SUPER-HOBBS! AND CALL ME CALVIN THE ELDRITCH CULTIST!



SO THIS IS HOW YOU SEE YOUR STUFFED TIGER! HELLO, HOBBS, OR SUPER-HOBBS! SUSIE'S MEMORIES MENTION YOU ENOUGH THAT I CAN PULL THEM UP EASILY, ALTHOUGH I'M STILL PROCESSING MOST OF THEM!




HI, SUPER-HOBBS! YOU MAKE ME WANT TO FIND MR. BUN AND SEE IF I CAN MAKE HIM VISIBLE TO EVERYBODY ELSE THE SAME WAY!



GREETINGS TO YOU, SUPER-HOBBS! I DID NOT HAVE A ROBOTIC TIGER COMPANION IN MY ORIGINAL REALITY, BUT IT DIVERGED SIGNIFICANTLY FROM THIS ONE BEFORE IT WAS DESTROYED. IF YOU ARE A FRIEND TO HIM, YOU ARE A FRIEND TO ME AS WELL!



WOW! HELLO, SUPER-HOBBS! YOU REALLY DO HAVE MANDIBLES OF DEATH AND A KILLER'S EYE! AS LONG AS YOU ONLY USE THEM AGAINST THE CHICKEN AND HIS ALLIES, JUST LIKE TIFFANY DOES!



A DOOR BURST OPEN!



HELLO, ZHUPARR, AND HELLO, HOBBS! YOU BOTH HAVE PASSED MY ENHANCED HOSTILITY CHECK, AS WELL AS MY STANDARD ONE THAT I DO FOR ALL SUMMONS! AT LEAST THE PROPHECY TOLD ME YOU'D BE COMING, SO I HAD THE PAPERWORK DONE IN ADVANCE!



I LIKE GREETING NEW SUMMONS PERSONALLY! SAVE YOUR POWERS FOR YALDABA-AWK, OR YOU'LL SEE WHAT MY POWERS ARE LIKE! GOOD LUCK IN YOUR FIGHT!

THANK YOU, EVERYBODY! AND YES, MA'AM! NO ONE WHO'S SMART ANTAGONIZES ON! WE BOTH KNOW THAT NOW!



AFTER TIFFANY LEFT... IT'S ALL WORKING OUT! WHICH IS GOOD, BUT WE STILL HAVE A WAY TO GO TO PROPERLY FIGHT THE CHICKEN GOD! WAIT, YOUR EYEPATCH SWITCHED AGAIN!




THE MAGIC HOLDING US HERE IS WEAKENING AGAIN! WE SHOULD PROBABLY WRAP THINGS UP!



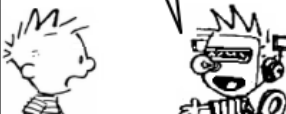
IN WHICH CASE, SINCE CALVIN IS AN ALTERNATE VERSION OF ME, I CAN USE MY ANSIBLE TO ESTABLISH A PSYCHIC CONNECTION WITH HIM, JUST AS I HAVE DONE WITH SEYMOUR. GIVE ME A MOMENT TO DO THE APPROPRIATE SCAN... DONE!



AND WE SHOULD GET TO LIBERATING CALVIN AND SARANNA BEFORE IT WEAKENS MORE, JUST IN CASE SOMETHING GOES WRONG! EVERYONE FOLLOW ME TO THE WISHING CARPET!



ON THE WAY THERE... HOW DOES THE PSYCHIC CONNECTION WORK? MUCH LIKE A MENTAL PHONE CALL YOU CAN PICK UP. IT CAN ALSO WORK AS AN EMERGENCY BEACON IF THE SITUATION IS BAD ENOUGH, SUCH AS THE IMPENDING WAR WITH THE CHICKEN.



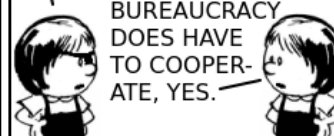
AND SINCE I'M POWERED PARTLY BY CALVIN'S IMAGINATION, I SHOULD BE ABLE TO MAKE A CONNECTION LIKE THAT TOO! I'LL HAVE TO PRACTICE!



I WISH THERE WAS A WAY FOR US TO KEEP IN TOUCH! HAVING YOUR MEMORIES ISN'T THE SAME, EVEN AFTER I FINALLY PROCESS THEM ALL! MAYBE IF I SUMMON MR. BUN SOMETIME, HE CAN HELP!




ASSUMING YOU CAN FIND ANOTHER ELDRITCH BEING TO MAKE HIM REAL TO EVERYBODY? I HOPE TIFFANY LETS IT THROUGH! THE CELESTIAL BUREAUCRACY DOES HAVE TO COOPERATE, YES.



THERE... IT LOOKS JUST LIKE A NORMAL CARPET!




I KNOW, BUT THERE'S A REASON IT'S IN THIS BUILDING SURROUNDED BY A MAGICAL AURA VISIBLE EVEN TO AMATEURS!

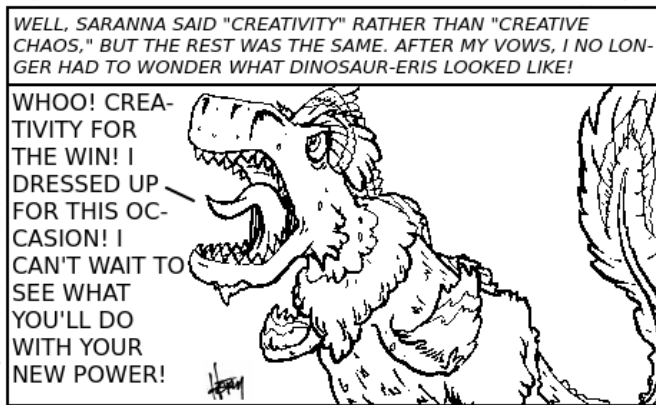
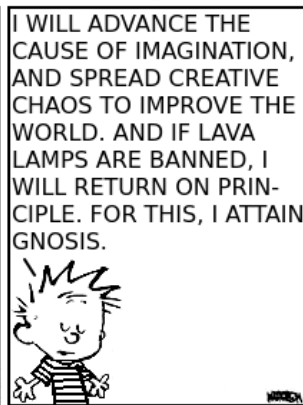
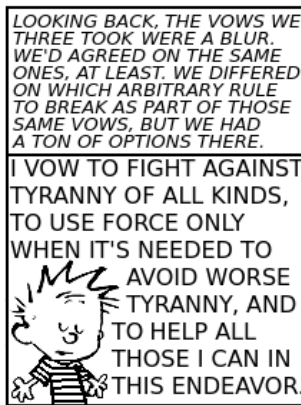
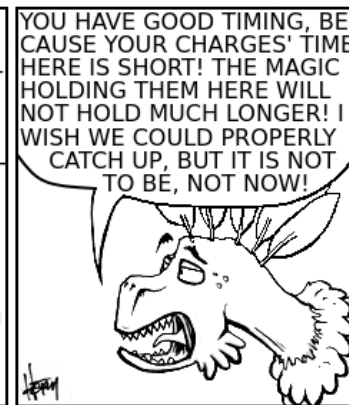
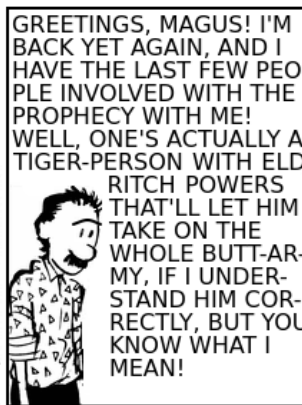
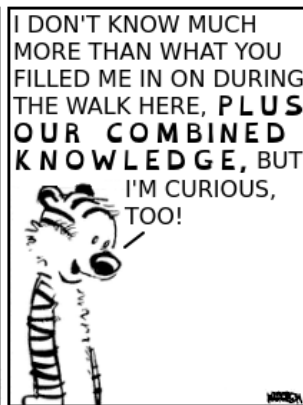
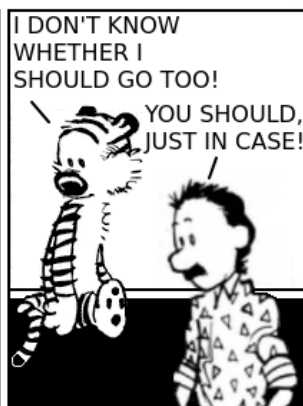
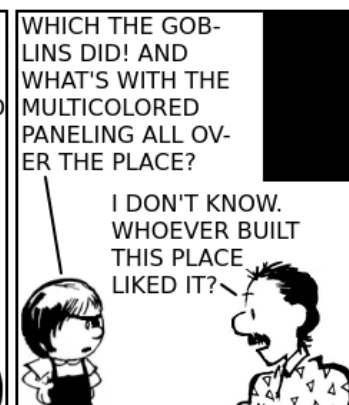
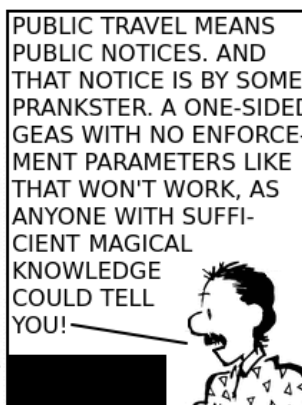
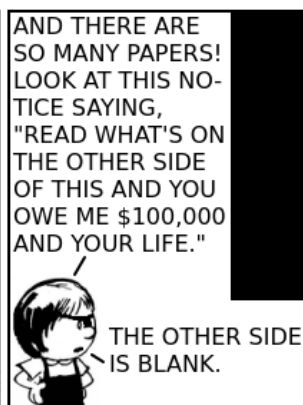


IT LOOKED LIKE A NEON GLOW TO ME, REMINISCENT OF THE LAVA LAMP IMAGE THAT BRIAN HAD SHOWN DURING THE RITUAL. (WHICH REMINDED ME: LAVA LAMPS WERE COOL AND I NEEDED TO GET A REAL ONE FOR BOTH AESTHETIC AND RITUAL PURPOSES.) AND THEY JUST LET ANYONE IN HERE TO USE THE CARPET?



IT HAS A BUNCH OF PRESERVATION SPELLS ON IT TO KEEP IT FROM BEING DAMAGED OR DESTROYED, AND ANYONE WHO USES IT NEEDS SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE OF WHERE TO GO, UNLESS THEY ONLY WANT TO GO TO CERTAIN PUBLIC LOCATIONS! AND I HAVE THE RIGHT SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE WE NEED!





SARANNA WAS MORE CONFIDENT IN HER VOWS THAN I WAS.

...AND IF THERE'S EVER A BAN ON PUTTING RANCH DRESSING ON SPICY TOPOKKI, I WILL RETURN ON PRINCIPLE. FOR THIS, I ATTAIN GNO-SIS.



I FOUND OUT LATER THAT TOPOKKI WAS A RICE CAKE NOODLE DISH A LOT OF THE GOBLINS LIKED, AND WHICH SARANNA HAD EATEN WITH THEM A FEW TIMES. SHE'D INTRODUCED THEM TO RANCH DRESSING WHEN SHE COULDN'T HANDLE ITS SPICE LEVEL.

ALSO, THIS RITUAL WAS SUPERFICIALLY SIMILAR TO THE RITUAL THAT THE GOBLINS USED TO OFFICIALLY MAKE HER AN HONORARY GREMLIN, WHICH IS WHY SHE TOOK IT IN STRIDE.

I WAS AT LEAST REASSURED BY SEEING ERIS IN ANOTHER FORM. I WONDERED HOW SUPER-HOBBS WAS HOLDING UP.

POST-GNOSIS VERTIGO IS WORSE WHEN IT'S FOR TWO, EVEN IF ONLY ONE OF US NEEDED IT!



IT TURNED OUT THAT HOBBS WAS LIBERATED ALREADY, BECAUSE I'D PUT HIM IN THAT FORM INSTEAD OF THE CHICKEN. ZHUPARR WAS LIKELY LIBERATED BY ITS ELDRITCH POWER, BUT IT WENT THROUGH THE RITUAL JUST IN CASE, MUCH LIKE BRIAN.

IT IS DONE! YOU ALL SHOULD RECOVER SOON FROM THE EXPERIENCE, AS MAX DID.



WE WERE IN THE MIDDLE OF RECOVERING WHEN SHAMAN GHEFZARAL APPEARED AGAIN. APPARENTLY, THE MAGUS HAD BEEN RIGHT ABOUT THE MAGIC'S WEARING THIN.

GOOD. YOU HAVE SUMMONED WHO YOU NEEDED TO SUMMON, AND YOU ARE LIBERATED. ZARB IS UNABLE TO HOLD THE SPELL MUCH LONGER.



NOTHING ELSE ESSENTIAL REMAINS. I RECOMMEND YOU RETURN WITHIN THE NEXT TWO MINUTES, BECAUSE THE SPELL WILL HOLD FOR NO MORE THAN FIVE.



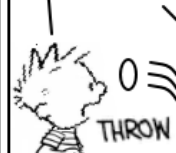
IT'LL TAKE ABOUT FIVE MINUTES TO GET BACK TO THE WISHING CARPET, EVEN IF WE RUN! I'LL HAVE TO TELL EVERYONE ELSE GOODBYE FOR YOU!

SUPER-HOBBS CAN USE HIS VOID POWER TO WRINKLE SPACE-TIME AND TELEPORT, BUT NO ONE ELSE CAN!



HOW WILL SUPER-HOBBS RETURN WITH US? HE DOESN'T HAVE A LANYARD OF RETURNING!

WE ACCOUNTED FOR THIS. HERE IS A SPARE LANYARD, COURTESY OF ZARB. CATCH!



I'LL SEE YOU AGAIN THE NEXT TIME THE BARRIER BETWEEN PLANES WEAKENS NATURALLY, WHICH SHOULD BE AROUND HALLOWEEN! UNLESS YOU FIGURE OUT ANOTHER WAY BEFORE THEN!



I'LL MISS YOU, UNCLE MAX!
I'LL MISS YOU TOO! WE'RE NOT RELATED, BUT... THIS HAS BEEN GOOD!



I'LL MISS YOU BOTH TOO! AT LEAST THE GOBLINS CAN HELP YOU! AND, SPEAKING OF BONDS, IF YOU EVER FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED TO KRALTAR, WOULD YOU LET ME KNOW?



YOU SAID THAT WAS A MATTER OF GOBLIN SECURITY, SO... AS LONG AS FINDING OUT DOESN'T BREAK THAT! REAL FRIENDS ARE HARD TO FIND, I KNOW!



YOU HAVE BRIAN AND SUSIE! WE'LL MISS THEM, TOO!

I'LL MISS YOU, TOO! I REMEMBER YOUR LAST VISIT WHEN YOU WERE STILL ALIVE, AND ZHUPARR HAS SIMILARLY MINDED RELATIVES AMONG THE CHICKEN'S ENSLAVED BRAIN WORMS THAT IT MISSES!



IT'S STILL WEIRD HAVING TWO PEOPLE IN MY HEAD... OUR HEAD!

SAME FOR SOMEONE ELSE'S MEMORIES!



THANKS, EVERYBODY! I WISH THAT SUPER-HOBBS COULD HAVE GOTTEN TO KNOW BRIAN AND SUSIE, TOO!



WE'LL MEET AGAIN SOMETIME AND REMEDY THAT!



AND AFTER THE WAR IS OVER, ZHUPARR CAN INTRODUCE YOU TO ITS RELATIVES, ONCE THEY'RE ALL FREED!

IF YOU THREE ARE ALL READY, I WILL MANUALLY PULL YOU BACK NOW. YOU STILL NEED TIME TO RECOVER, BUT WE CAN PASS IT OFF AS A BRIEF ILLNESS AND USE IT AS COVER TO DEBRIEF YOU.



WHY DO WE NEED TO BE DEBRIEFED?

WE MUST BE CERTAIN THAT YOU UNDERSTAND ALL THAT YOU NEED TO.

WHAT ABOUT THE GUIDE WE NEED?



THE ONE THE PROPHECY SPEAKS OF? WE HAVE ARRANGED FOR ONE, WHOM WE WILL COVER IN YOUR DEBRIEFING. FEAR NOT.

...IF YOU SAY SO!



I'M READY! I AM READY, SHAMAN.

I'M READY, TOO! I'LL HAVE TO HIDE WHEN I ARRIVE!

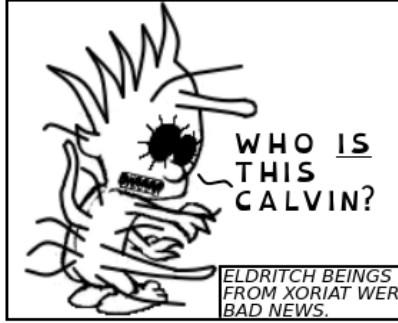


AS THE GHOST PLANE BEGAN TO WAVER AND SHIMMER AROUND US, I THOUGHT OF ALL WE'D LEARNED HERE. IT'D BEEN HOURS, BUT IT FELT LIKE MONTHS.

AS UNFORTUNATE AS THEY WERE TO BE ENSLAVED BY THE CHICKEN, THE GOBLINS HAD AT LEAST KEPT A LOT OF THEMSELVES AFTERWARD. THE CHICKEN WAS GETTING CRAZIER, BUT HE HADN'T QUITE GONE OFF THE DEEP END. YET.

KNOWING THAT ESCAPE FROM THEIR BONDS VIA ELDRITCH POWER WAS A COMPLEX BUSINESS, ONE THAT IRREPARABLY WARPED MOST OF THOSE WHO TRIED IT, MADE ME APPRECIATE HOW FORTUNATE I WAS TO NOT BE ENSLAVED AND TO HAVE DEALT WITH SOMEONE LIKE ZHUPARR.

EVIL ELDRITCH BEINGS WOULD ENSLAVE YOU **AND** MUTATE YOU INTO A WORSE FORM. AN ALTERNATE VERSION OF ME HAD LEARNED THAT THE HARD WAY, AS I FOUND OUT A FEW YEARS LATER.



WE MADE IT! WE'RE BACK! STILL DIZZY... THANK YOU FOR YOUR WORK, ZARB!

YOU'RE WELCOME! TIME HAS STARTED FLOWING AGAIN FOR EVERYONE OTHER THAN ME, SHAMAN GHEFZARAL, AND YOU THREE. NOW FOLLOW ME TO THE INFIRMARY! YOUR GUIDE AWAITS!



IN TIFFANY'S OFFICE...

GOOD. IT'S RESOLVED, AND I ONLY HAVE TO DO A LITTLE MORE PAPERWORK. I MUST ALSO PREPARE! WE FINALLY GET TO OPENLY GO TO WAR WITH YALDABA-AWK!



CHECKING MY MAIL...

THERE'S A NEW BRANCH OF DREMVALAAR'S WITNESSES: THE UNIFIED D.W.'S THAT BELIEVE THAT DREMVALAAR IS HALF-NON-EXISTENT AND HALF POOP.



AND THEY FIGHT OVER WHETHER THE LEFT SIDE IS NON-EXISTENT AND THE RIGHT SIDE IS POOP, OR VICE VERSA! I'LL NEED TO HIRE MORE SECURITY GUARDS!



I HAVE ENOUGH LOGISTICS TO WORRY ABOUT WITHOUT MORE BRAWLING! "YOU'VE PUT HALF-POOP-DREMVALAAR'S NON-EXISTENCE ON THE WRONG SIDE!" WHAT BUNKUM!



IN BETTER NEWS,

THE ANTI-CHICKEN GROUPS READY TO BREAK ALL HIS ANTI-SEX COMMANDMENTS AND ALL HIS ANTI-BLASPHEMY COMMANDMENTS ARE READY!



SOME OF THEM HAVE JOINED FORCES! YALDABA-AWK WILL BE DEFEATED NOT JUST WITH ORGIES AND BLASPHEMY, BUT WITH BLASPHEMOUS ORGIES! JOY!



NOW THE GOBLINS MUST DO THEIR PART FOR THE PROPHECY IN THE REALM OF THE LIVING! DESPITE THEIR BONDAGE, THEY'RE STRONG, AND THEY WILL PROVE THAT!



IN THE GOBLINS' INFIRMARY...

ANOTHER DIMENSIONAL RIFT HAS OPENED, BRINGING PEOPLE THE CHICKEN CAN'T EAT WITHOUT TROUBLE, AND THE BUTT-VICEROY CAN'T BRAIN-WASH! IT'S A PERFECT OPPORTUNITY FOR HEALER GHOLZOMPUS!

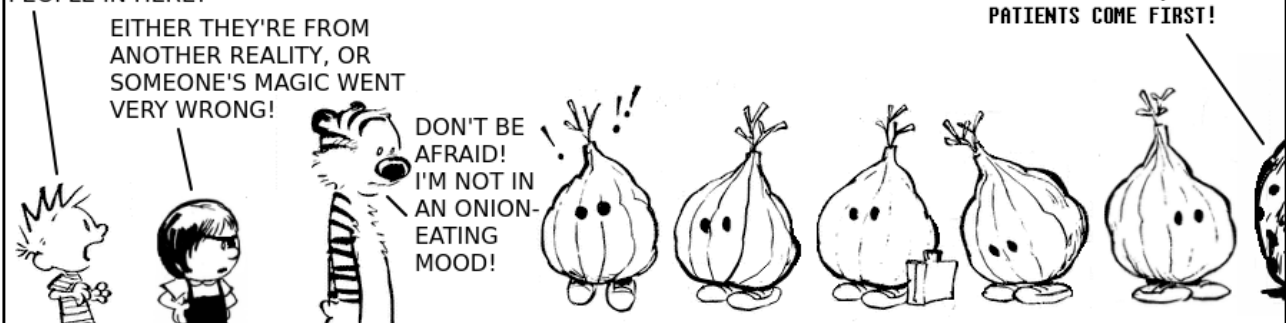


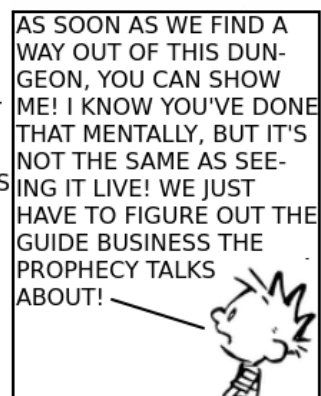
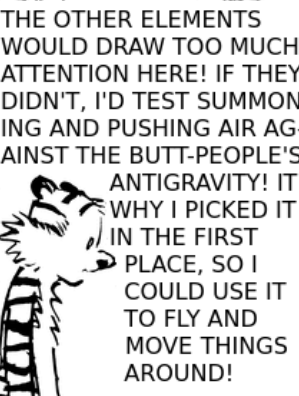
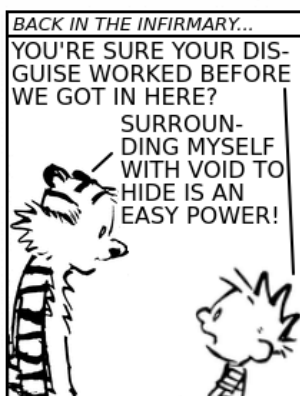
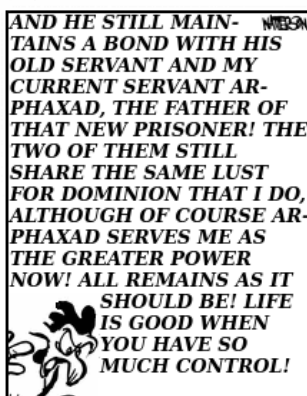
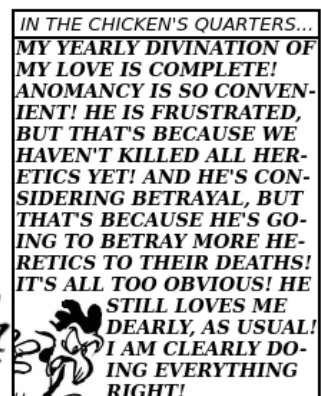
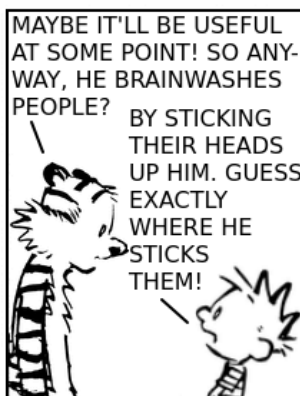
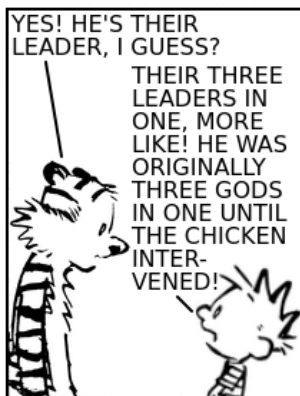
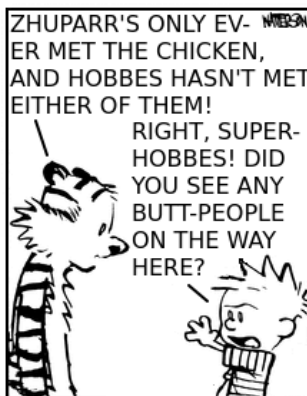
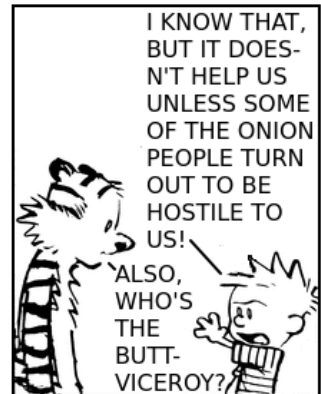
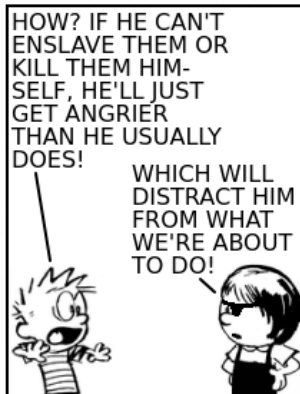
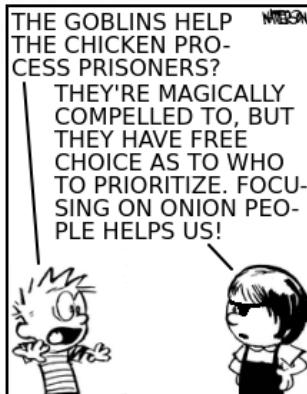
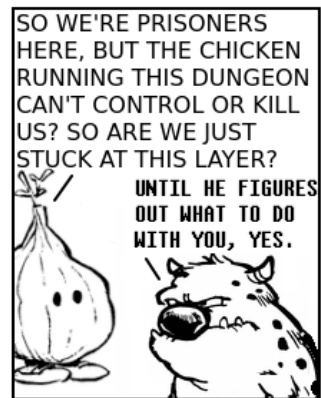
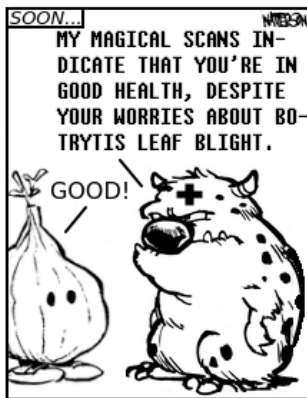
WHAT'S UP WITH ALL THE ONION PEOPLE IN HERE?

EITHER THEY'RE FROM ANOTHER REALITY, OR SOMEONE'S MAGIC WENT VERY WRONG!

DON'T BE AFRAID! I'M NOT IN AN ONION-EATING MOOD!

I AM HEALER GHOLZOMPUS. I WILL BE WITH YOU SHORTLY. PROPHECY OR NOT, MY NEW PATIENTS COME FIRST!





IT'S NOT JUST THE ONION PEOPLE! THERE'S BEEN TALK OVER THE LAST WEEK THAT THE CHICKEN'S AGENTS HAVE CAPTURED SEVERAL ORCS, INCLUDING JABEZ STONETUSK, THE LEADER OF THE KOTEK CLAN! HE'LL BE EVEN MORE ENRAGED BY HAVING BOTH ORCS AND ONION PEOPLE AROUND!



ESPECIALLY THE KOTEK CLAN, BECAUSE THEY BREAK TWO COMMANDMENTS: 1111, WHICH BANS WEARING MIXED FABRIC PATTERNS, AND 9758, WHICH BANS DISCO MUSIC AND ANYTHING INFLUENCED BY IT AS THE WORST OF ABOMINATIONS! THEIR SKILL AT DISCO DANCING IS LEGENDARY!



BACK IN THE DAYS OF THE OLD TRINITY, DAD WOULD GO OFF ABOUT HOW HE HATED DISCO MUSIC! BUT, SOMEHOW, HE STILL LIKED THAT "TARZAN BOY" SONG! AND IF HE'D KNOWN ABOUT UNCLE MAX AND "KUNG FU FIGHTING," HE'D RANT ABOUT HOW MAX HAD NO TASTE!



AND I THOUGHT USING "QUASAR" AS A SWEAR WORD WAS THE WORST OF ABOMINATIONS! THERE ARE AT LEAST THREE MORE COMMANDMENTS THAT FALL IN THAT CATEGORY!



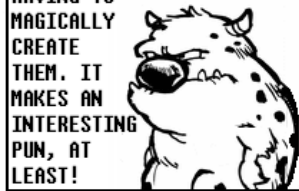
UNCLE MAX WAS LUCKY THE COMMANDMENT AGAINST DISCO HADN'T BEEN MADE YET DURING THE H.C.A.V. INCIDENT! DEFINITELY! ALTHOUGH MOST COMMANDMENTS ARE ONLY ENFORCED CONSISTENTLY IF THE CHICKEN HAS IT IN FOR YOU!



BUT ENOUGH ABOUT THAT. HEALER GHOLZOMPUS AND ZIF LOOK LIKE THEY'RE ALMOST DONE WITH THE ONION PEOPLE. ALTHOUGH ZIF LOOKS AS THOUGH HE'S ABOUT TO GIVE US BAD NEWS!



ZAR'NA IS CORRECT. YOUR GUIDE WILL BE DELAYED UNTIL TOMORROW NIGHT DUE TO AN UNFORESEEN TECHNICAL PROBLEM: THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH ZARNIUM-COATED PARTS AVAILABLE WITHOUT HAVING TO MAGICALLY CREATE THEM. IT MAKES AN INTERESTING PUN, AT LEAST!



WHAT'S ZARNIUM, ANYWAY? AN ALCHEMICAL SUBSTANCE THE GOBLINS USE TO MAKE THINGS INVISIBLE TO MOST FORMS OF SIGHT.



HEALER GHOLZOMPUS IS INFORMING THE CHICKEN THAT YOU AND THE BOY... HE'S NO OFFICIAL GREMLIN, BUT CALL HIM... ZALV'N. HE'S HELPING US ALL.



FINE. ...YOU AND ZALV'N HAVE COME DOWN WITH A MINOR ILLNESS THAT REQUIRES YOU TO BE ISOLATED FOR A FEW WEEKS AT MINIMUM. THAT SHOULD BE ENOUGH TIME FOR YOU TO DO WHAT YOU NEED TO DO. AFTER DEBRIEFING.



YES. ZUNG WILL BE HERE IN A MINUTE TO DEBRIEF YOU AND MAKE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND ALL THAT YOU SHOULD BEFORE YOU FULFILL THE PROPHECY. THANK YOU, ZIF.



I DON'T KNOW ENOUGH TO BE SURE WHETHER I WANT TO BE AN OFFICIAL GREMLIN! IT SEEMS TO HAVE WORKED FOR YOU, BUT... I'LL AT LEAST TEACH YOU TO ADDRESS THEM PROPERLY! AND THEY ALSO NEED TO DO BETTER THAN "THE BOY!"



THE DEBRIEFING WENT WELL. SARANNA AND I TOLD THEM WHAT WE'D LEARNED FROM THE GHOSTS AND BRIAN. THEN IT GOT MORE INTERESTING. WE HAVE DONE OUR BEST TO ACCOMMODATE YOUR VISION. WHAT IT LIKELY MEANS?



GOING FAR ENOUGH INTO SPACE WILL GET YOU OUT OF RANGE OF THE CHICKEN AND HIS ARCHONS. "BOB" IS UNABLE TO HELP, UNFORTUNATELY. "BOB" WAS A PASSENGER ON THEIR CRAFT, WITH NO ENGINEERING SKILLS. THAT'S A SHAME.



AND THAT CRAFT WAS SIGNIFICANTLY DAMAGED, ANYWAY. THERE WAS ONE OTHER OUR FELLOW GREMLINS WERE ABLE TO REPAIR. LESS TALENT FOR GOBLIN MAGIC MEANS THE CHICKEN'S TETHER BINDS US LESS.



AND YOU, WITH YOUR COMPLETE LACK OF IT DUE TO BEING BIOLOGICALLY HUMAN, ARE NOT BOUND BY IT AT ALL. YES, I REMEMBER, ZUNG. WE'RE BOTH GREMLINS.



SARANNA'S HERE INDEFINITELY, BUT I ONLY HAVE TWO WEEKS LEFT ON MY SENTENCE BEFORE I'M BRAINWASHED OR EXECUTED! ILLNESS PERMITS EXTENDING SENTENCES BY UP TO A WEEK.



THE CHICKEN BELIEVES THAT ALLOWING PRISONERS TO SUFFER FROM ILLNESS WILL MOTIVATE THEM TO JOIN HIM. HIS POWER CAN CURE ANY ILLNESS.

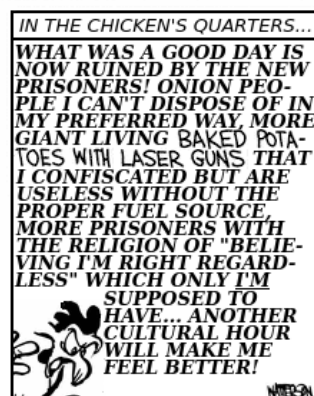
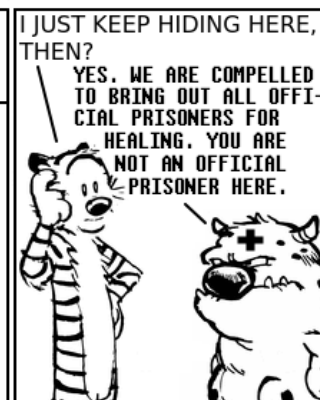
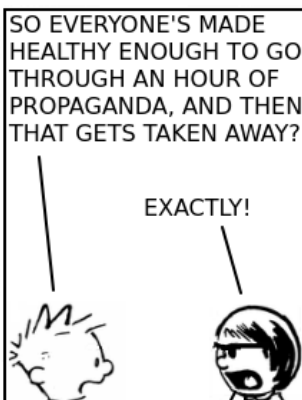
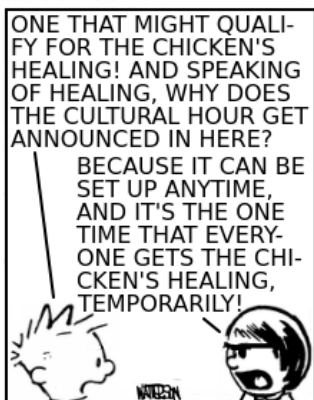
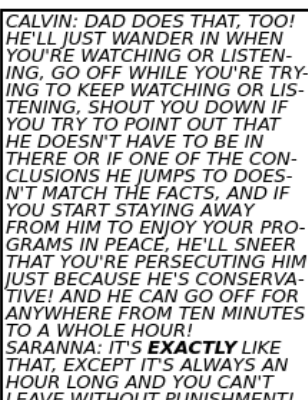
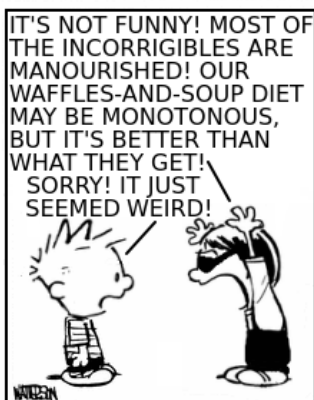
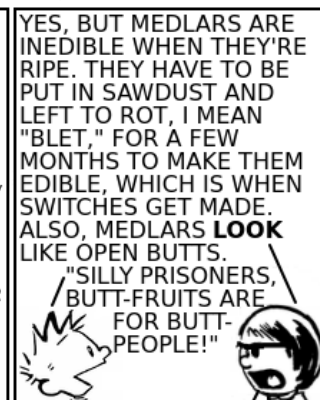
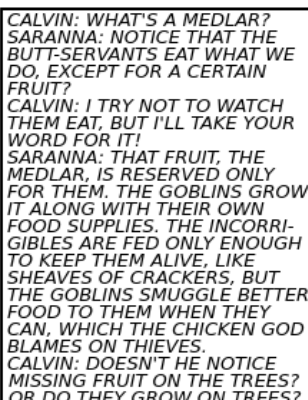
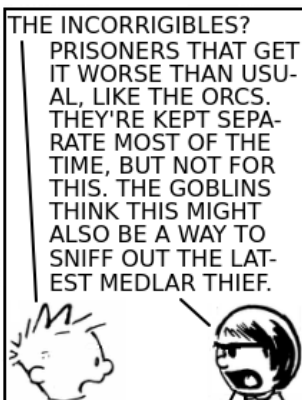
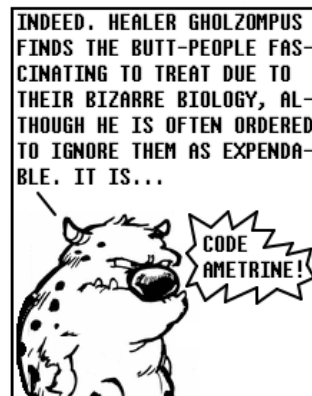
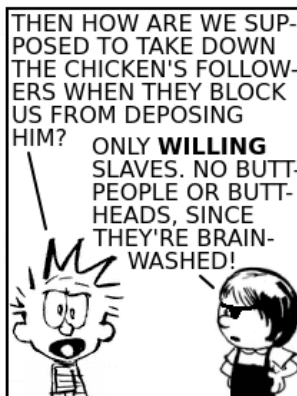
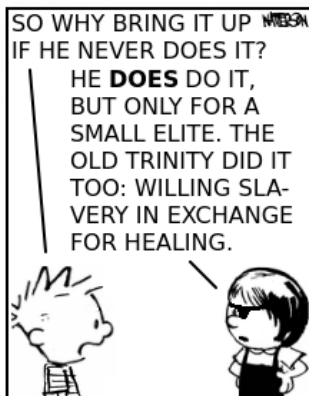


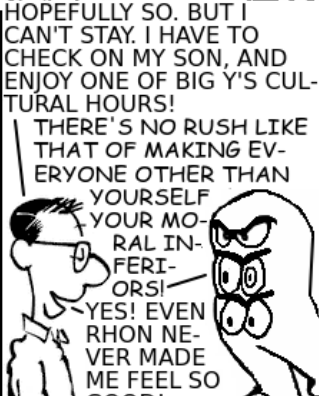
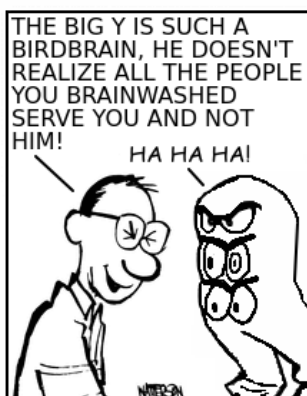
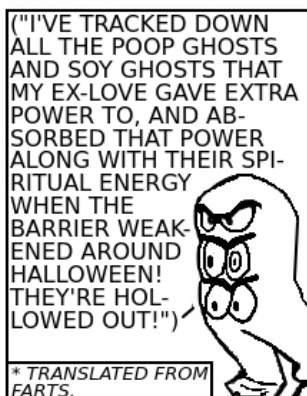
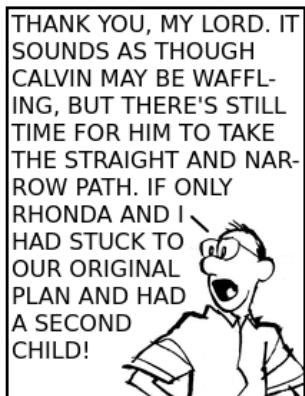
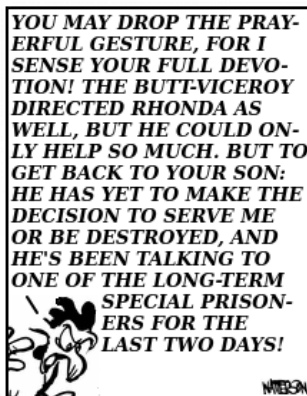
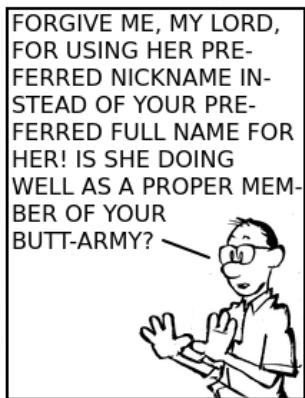
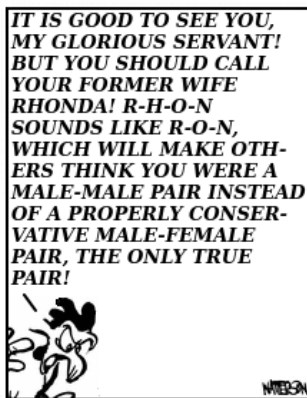
WHY DO YOU EVEN HAVE AN INFIRMARY, THEN? WHY IS THERE A HEALTH CARE SYSTEM OUT IN THE WORLD THAT'S REALLY A WAY TO TORTURE AND MURDER PEOPLE? IF HE COULD CURE ANYTHING ALL ALONG...

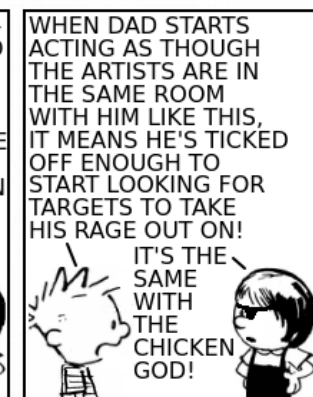
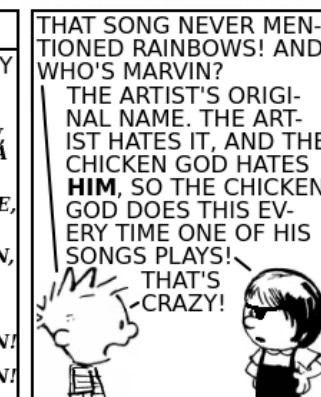
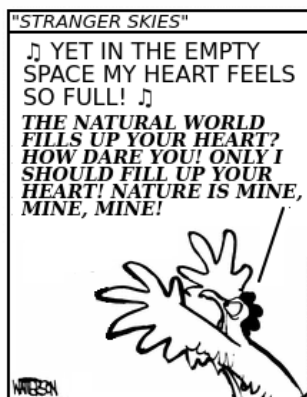
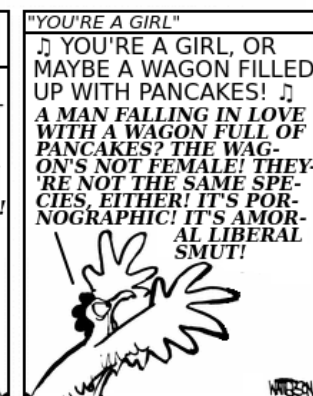
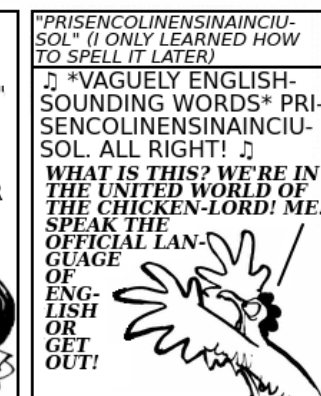
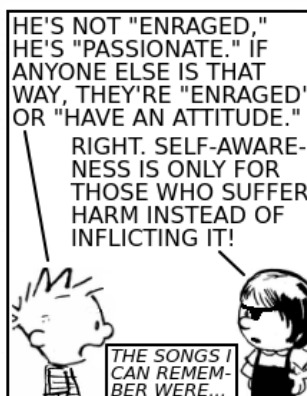
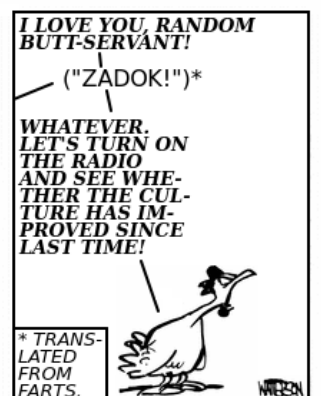
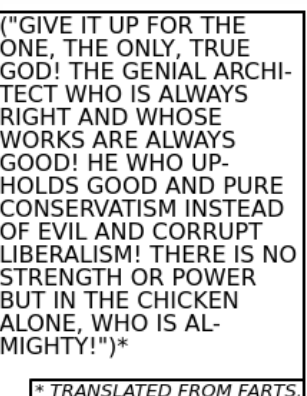
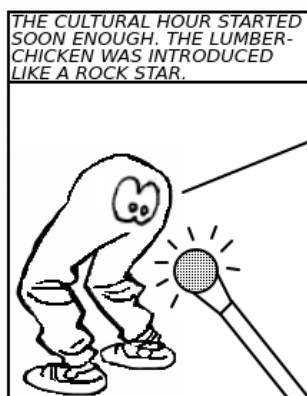
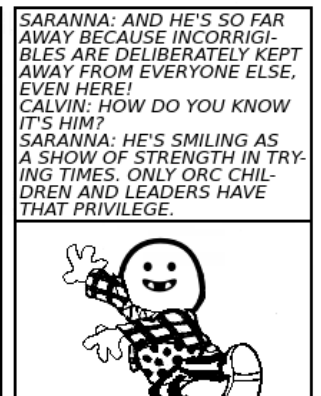
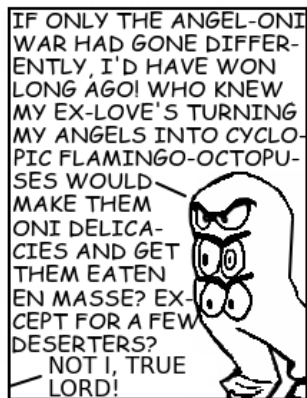


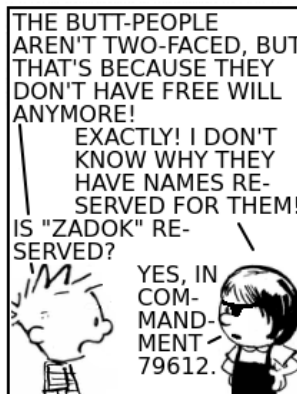
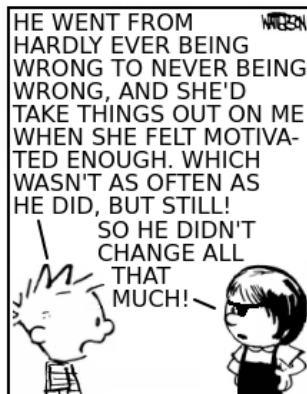
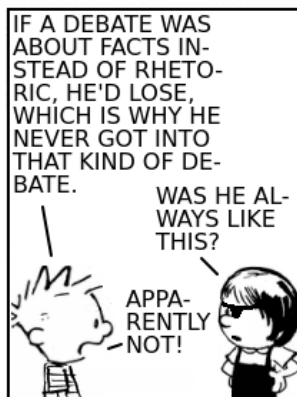
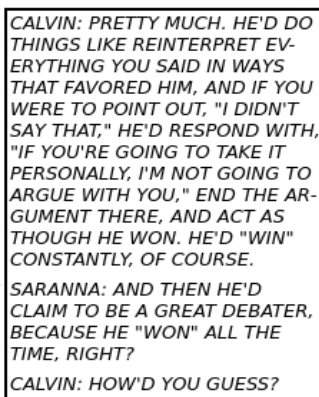
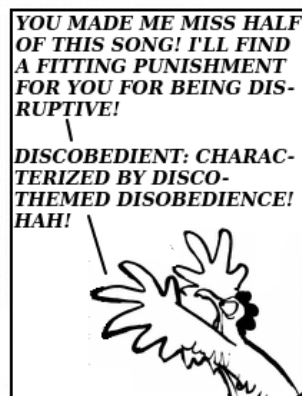
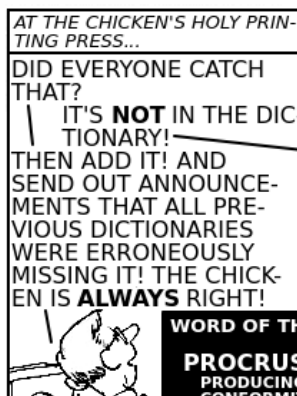
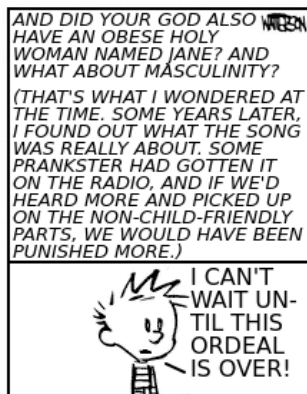
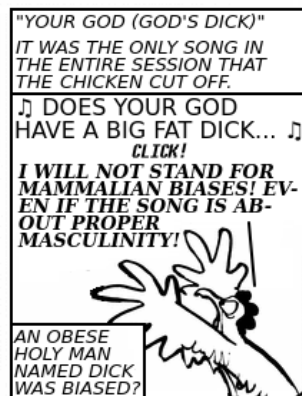
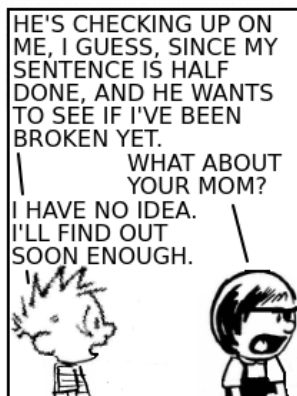
HE COULD. WHETHER HE DOES IS UP TO HIM. THE DEBRIEFING TAUGHT ME A LOT! NOW YOU KNOW WHY I FREAKED OUT AFTER I LEARNED ABOUT THE SECRET MASS KILLINGS!











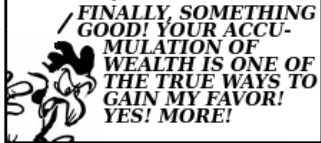
MELVILLE FROM THAT ALTERNATE FUTURE ACTS JUST LIKE YOUR DAD IN TERMS OF DOING THE OPPOSITE OUT OF SPITE, ALTHOUGH HE USES "YOU REALLY TRIED!" AS HIS FAVORITE PHRASE! SO A MORE SARCASTIC DAD JUNIOR, AND SOMEONE NOT TO BECOME! RIGHT!



"TRACKING TREASURE DOWN" THE CHICKEN SEEMED TO CALM DOWN WITH THIS SONG. HE ASSUMED IT WAS PRAISING HIM BECAUSE HE ONLY PAID ATTENTION TO THE CHORUS, BUT IF THAT KEPT HIM FROM TARGETING PEOPLE, I DIDN'T MIND.

♪ AT THE SAME TIME (AT THE SAME TIME), YOU KEEP TRACKING TREASURE DOWN! ♪

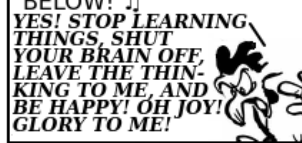
FINALLY, SOMETHING GOOD! YOUR ACCUMULATION OF WEALTH IS ONE OF THE TRUE WAYS TO GAIN MY FAVOR! YES! MORE!



"NO BRAIN, NO PAIN" THIS WAS SYNCHRONICITY: A SONG BY ONE OF THE ARTISTS MENTIONED IN THAT BOOK OF BARDIC PROVERBS I'D FOUND IN THE GHOST LIBRARY. IT WAS ATYPICAL OF THE GROUP'S USUAL FARE, BUT AGAIN, THE CHICKEN PAID ONLY SUPERFICIAL ATTENTION.

♪ DON'T TRY TO RISE ABOVE IT, IT'S BETTER BELOW! ♪


YES! STOP LEARNING THINGS, SHUT YOUR BRAIN OFF, LEAVE THE THINKING TO ME, AND BE HAPPY! OH JOY! GLORY TO ME!



"DEAD END" THE NEXT SONG WAS ALSO BY AN ARTIST FROM THAT BOOK OF BARDIC PROVERBS. AND UNDER AN ALIAS, SHE'D ALSO MADE ANOTHER SONG, THE MUSIC VIDEO FOR WHICH HAD HELPED CALL ZHUPARR.

I HOPED MY FACIAL EXPRESSION DIDN'T GIVE AWAY MY SHOCK, BUT THE CHICKEN HAD GONE BACK TO RAGE MODE.

WHAT? SHE CHANGED HER GIVEN NAME TO THAT NON-CONSERVATIVE GIVEN NAME? AND HY-PHENATED HER MARRIED SURNAME?



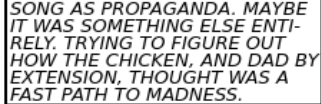
JUST LIKE DAD, HE'D FINALLY GOTTEN ENRAGED ENOUGH TO START GOING OFF ON THE ARTIST PERSONALLY, IGNORING THE MUSIC.

A WOMAN HYPHENATING HER NAME, OR KEEPING HER MAIDEN NAME, IS NOT CONSERVATIVE! HER GIVING UP HER NAME FOR HER HUSBAND'S IS THE PROPER SIGN OF HER STARTING A FAMILY! CORRUPTION FROM FEMINIST LIBERALS LEADING TO THE END OF SOCIETY! *BLAH BLAH RANT RANT* LIBERALS! *RANT RANT* LIBERALS! *BLAH* LIBERALS!



DAD HAD RANTED THE SAME WAY ON THE SUBJECT. I'VE NEVER UNDERSTOOD WHY IT'S SUCH A BIG DEAL TO SOME PEOPLE WHAT OTHER PEOPLE DECIDE TO CALL THEMSELVES.

ALSO, THE PREVIOUS SONG WAS PARTIALLY SUNG BY A MAN WHO HAD CHANGED HIS SURNAME, AND YET THE CHICKEN DIDN'T MAKE A PEEP ABOUT THAT. MAYBE IT WAS BECAUSE IT WAS A MAN AND NOT A WOMAN. MAYBE IT WAS BECAUSE IT DETRACTED FROM HIS MISUSING THE SONG AS PROPAGANDA. MAYBE IT WAS SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY. TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW THE CHICKEN, AND DAD BY EXTENSION, THOUGHT WAS A FAST PATH TO MADNESS.



THE SONG WAS ALMOST OVER BEFORE THE CHICKEN FINALLY NOTICED THE LYRICS.

♪ I KEEP GIVING YOU MY LOVE... ♪

WHAT'S THAT? "I CAN GET THAT HUMAN LOVE..."? THIS SONG IS ENCOURAGING LOVE BETWEEN HUMANS AND NON-HUMANS! INTERSPECIES MISCEGENATION IS NOT CONSERVATIVE!



SOME OF THE BUTT-SERVANTS, AS WELL AS THE BUTT-VICE-ROY HIMSELF, HAD BEEN GUARDING THE AUDITORIUM EXITS. I WAS SURPRISED TO HEAR THE LATTER SUDDENLY SPEAK UP, OR SHOULD I SAY FART UP.

("MY LORD, YOU SHOULD RECONSIDER, GIVEN THE REST OF THE SONG.")*


* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.



("LOSING LOVE IS AN IMPORTANT THING. SHE IS SAYING, 'I KEEP...')*

* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.

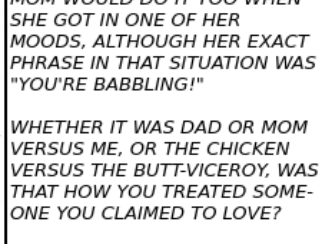
YOU'RE TELLING ME LIKE I CARE!



THERE IT WAS: DAD'S EXACT PHRASE THAT HE'D USE WHEN HE KNEW HE WAS RIGHT, REGARDLESS OF THE FACTS.

MOM WOULD DO IT TOO WHEN SHE GOT IN ONE OF HER MOODS, ALTHOUGH HER EXACT PHRASE IN THAT SITUATION WAS "YOU'RE BABBLING!"

WHETHER IT WAS DAD OR MOM VERSUS ME, OR THE CHICKEN VERSUS THE BUTT-VICE-ROY, WAS THAT HOW YOU TREATED SOMEONE YOU CLAIMED TO LOVE?



("THIS IS WHY I DO WHAT I DO. NEVER CHANGE!")*

* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.

THE LAST TWO FARTED WORDS SOUNDED SARCASTIC, BUT THAT WAS LOST ON THE CHICKEN.




THE IDEA THAT THE CHICKEN WAS SO MUCH LIKE MY DAD IN SOME WAYS BRIEFLY MADE ME WONDER IF THE BUTT-VICE-ROY WOULD HAVE LOVED DAD INSTEAD OF THE CHICKEN, BEFORE I BANISHED SUCH A DISTURBING THOUGHT FROM MY MIND. EVEN IF I HADN'T, THE CHICKEN'S NEXT SHOUT WOULD HAVE BANISHED IT ANYWAY.

LOVING OUTSIDE YOUR OWN SPECIES, CONTAMINATING YOUR PURITY, BRINGING FILTH INTO MY CIVILIZED WORLD! ORC, LOOK AT ME!



PROVE TO ME YOU'RE A FULL ORC, AND NOT ONE OF THOSE EVIL MIXED BREEDS! WHERE'S YOUR PEDIGREE?

YOU DESTROYED IT WHEN YOU BROUGHT ME AND MY CLAN MEMBERS HERE! SO YOU CAN'T PROVE IT! STOP MAKING EXCUSES!



THE CHICKEN PONDERED FOR A SECOND, SHAKING WITH ANGER, AND SUDDENLY MAGICALLY SHOUTED IN EVERYONE'S EARS. IT WASN'T TELEPATHY, WHICH BOTH I AND SARANNA WERE IMMUNE TO NOW, BUT FORCED HEARING.

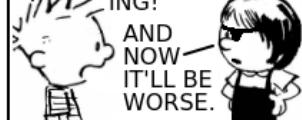
I HEREBY DECLARE TWO NEW COMMANDMENTS! 489231: THOU SHALT USE "DISCOBEDIENCE" AS AN OFFICIAL WORD! AND 489232: THOU SHALT TREAT ORCS WHO CANNOT PROVE PURE ORCISH ANCESTRY AS PRODUCTS OF MISCEGENATION! AS I HAVE DECLARED IT, SO SHALL IT BE!



WHAT DOES BEING PRODUCTS OF MISCEGENATION MEAN?


IT'S MIXING HUMAN BASELINE AND NON-HUMAN BASELINE. IT MEANS THEY GET EVEN LESS FOOD. YOU SAID THEY WERE ALREADY MALNOURISHED AND STARVING!

AND NOW IT'LL BE WORSE.



AND I'M ALSO MAKING A NEW RULE! FOR BEING THE ONE TO INSPIRE A NEW COMMANDMENT, JABEZ STONETUSK, YOUR REMAINING SENTENCE IS SHORTENED! SINCE YOU CAN'T BE ENSLAVED, YOU'LL BE EXECUTED IN ONE DAY INSTEAD OF TWO MORE WEEKS!

WHA... KILL ME THEN, YOU COWARD!



FOR YOUR INSOLENCE, YOU'RE LUCKY I DON'T EXECUTE YOU RIGHT HERE AND NOW! BUTT-SERVANTS! REMOVE THE INCORRIGIBLES' FOOD CHEST FOR THE NEXT TWO DAYS!

DO YOUR WORST!



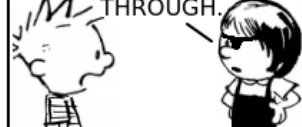
THE CHICKEN GLARED AT THE OTHER ORCS OF THE KOTEK CLAN. APPARENTLY HE DIDN'T LIKE THE WAY ONE OF THE ORCS EYED THE CHEST AS IT LEFT THEIR SIGHT, AND LASHED OUT AGAIN.

ORC! YOU MAKE A RUN FOR IT, I'LL BREAK YOUR ARM!



I GUESS INCORRIGIBLES DON'T GET GOOD MEDICAL CARE FOR BROKEN LIMBS?

OR FOR MUCH ELSE. THE CHICKEN GOD KEEPS THEM ALIVE, BUT NOT MUCH BEYOND THAT. YOU'D BE SURPRISED WHAT YOU CAN LIVE THROUGH.



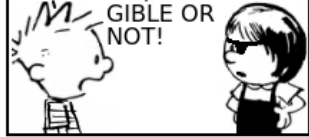
AS ARBITRARY AND SELF-SERVING AS HE IS, HE'S NEVER CUT THE LENGTH OF A SENTENCE BEFORE, THOUGH! WE NEED TO GET OUT A.S.A.P.!

REALLY? A LAWMAKER'S ABANDONING ALL RESTRAINTS ON HIMSELF AS SOON AS HE GETS IN A BAD MOOD ISN'T HOW THINGS WORK?



UNLESS SOMEONE'S HOLDING THEIR LEASH, ANYWAY?

NOT CHANGING SENTENCES IS ONE OF THE FEW THINGS HE'S ACTUALLY STUCK TO! NOT ANYMORE, IT SEEMS! BAD FOR ALL THE PRISONERS, INCORRIGIBLE OR NOT!



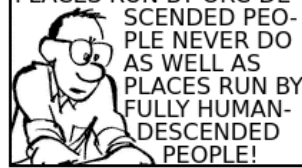
I DIDN'T KNOW THE SOON-TO-BE-EXECUTED ORC CHIEF, AND SARANNA ONLY KNEW OF HIM DUE TO THE ORIGINAL TIES BETWEEN GOBLINS AND ORCS, BUT THIS WAS EVEN MORE UNFAIR THAN USUAL.

YEARS LATER, WHEN ALL THIS WAS OVER AND THE CHICKEN GOD WAS LONG DETHRONED, THERE WAS A PETITION FOR A "DISCOBEDIENCE DAY" TO REMEMBER THROUGH DANCE ALL THE INCORRIGIBLES WHO DIED DUE TO THE CHICKEN'S VENGEFUL PETTINESS, WHICH I GLADLY SIGNED.

EVEN DAD WAS NEVER THIS BAD. I BRIEFLY WONDERED WHETHER THE CHICKEN HAD BEEN INSPIRED BY SOMEONE EVEN WORSE OR HAD COME UP WITH THIS BEHAVIOR ON HIS OWN. BUT DID IT REALLY MATTER?

DAD HAD NO PROBLEM ENABLING IT, THOUGH.

I'M NOT RACIST, BUT PLACES RUN BY ORC-DESCENDED PEOPLE NEVER DO AS WELL AS PLACES RUN BY FULLY HUMAN-DESCENDED PEOPLE!



THEY'RE GETTING WHAT THEY DESERVE. I ONLY HOPE MY SON DOESN'T SYMPATHIZE WITH SUCH LOWER-CLASS TYPES! I RAISED HIM TO DO BETTER THAN THAT!

I DON'T THINK HE SAW WHERE I WAS IN THE AUDIENCE YET. JUST IN CASE, I KEPT UP A NEUTRAL EXPRESSION.



I THINK THE HOUR'S JUST ABOUT UP!

WHICH MEANS WE'LL HAVE TO PRETEND TO BE SICK AS SOON AS THE HEALING AURA WEARS OFF! BUT SINCE DAD'S HERE, HE'S GOING TO WANT TO CHECK UP ON ME!

RIGHT! CATCH UP WITH ME AS SOON AS YOU CAN!



THE INCORRIGIBLES WERE LED AWAY, THE CHIEF DEFINITELY DISCO DANCING ON HIS WAY OUT.

APPARENTLY THE CHICKEN GAVE EVERYONE A FIVE-MINUTE GRACE PERIOD ON THE HEALING AURA. HOW HE COULD BE SO GENEROUS ONE MINUTE AND SO UNPREDICTABLE THE NEXT WAS A QUESTION I WAS NEVER ABLE TO ANSWER.

DAD FINALLY NOTICED ME, AND MADE HIS WAY TO ME AS SARANNA HEADED FOR THE INFIRMARY AGAIN.

HELLO, CALVIN. I TRUST YOU'RE LEARNING HOW TO BEHAVE PROPERLY? WE MUST ALL GROW UP SOMETIME!

OF COURSE I AM! I CAN SEE WHAT MISBEHAVING WILL GET ME!



WHY ARE YOU SO NEGATIVE? DON'T YOU SEE THE BENEFITS OF OBEYING THE RIGHT AUTHORITIES? THE ONLY REAL WAY TO ADVANCE IS TO DO THAT!

YES, SIR!



I TOLD HIM WHAT HE WANTED TO HEAR. FROM PAST EXPERIENCE, HE'D EITHER BUY IT AND GET SO PLEASED WITH HIMSELF THAT HE'D IGNORE ME, OR HE'D LATCH ONTO SOME REASON (REAL OR NOT) TO TEAR INTO ME REGARDLESS. I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH THAT HE BOUGHT IT THIS TIME. DID HE EXPECT SOMEONE HE HAD THROWN IN A DUNGEON TO BE HONEST WITH HIM AT ALL?

IT REMINDED ME OF ANOTHER LINE IN THAT BOOK OF BARDIC WISDOM: "I'D RATHER STAY A CHILD AND KEEP MY SELF-RESPECT IF BEING AN ADULT MEANS BEING LIKE YOU."

I DIDN'T HAVE DAD'S UNLIMITED CAPACITY FOR TWO-FACEDNESS, THOUGH. IT WAS A RELIEF TO GET BACK TO THE INFIRMARY.

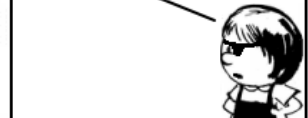
YOU ESCAPED WITHOUT DRAWING THE CHICKEN'S NOTICE! HOW SCARY WAS IT FOR YOU?



NOT AS SCARY AS THE WORLD WE'LL HAVE IF HE WINS, ESPECIALLY WITH PEOPLE LIKE DAD AT HIS SIDE AND FREELY SERVING HIM! BUT... SARANNA, HAVE YOU HAD TO DEAL WITH YOUR COUSIN SINCE YOU GOT HERE?



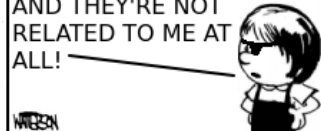
NOT MUCH. THE CHICKEN GOD MADE HER BREEDING STOCK, AND THE RECORDS SAY SHE DIED IN CHILDBIRTH AFTER A WHILE. SO MY ONLY LIVING FAMILY OTHER THAN MY SO-CALLED PARENTS ARE A HORDE OF BUTT-COUSINS ONCE REMOVED!



AND SINCE YOUR COUSIN WAS TRANSFORMED, DO THEY EVEN REALLY COUNT AS YOUR FAMILY?



GOOD QUESTION! A BETTER ONE IS, CONSIDERING HOW THEY ALL TREAT ME, DO THEY COUNT AS MY FAMILY AT ALL JUST BECAUSE THEY'RE RELATED TO ME BY BLOOD? THE GOBLINS TREAT ME MORE LIKE FAMILY THAN THAT, AND THEY'RE NOT RELATED TO ME AT ALL!



AND HOW DO PEOPLE LIKE MY DAD AND YOUR COUSIN THINK THE WAY THEY DO? "I'M GOING TO CLAIM CERTAINTY! I SAY I KNOW THINGS THAT I CAN'T POSSIBLY KNOW! AND WHERE DID I GET SUCH CERTAINTY?"



SARANNA-VISION: BACK TO THAT ALTERNATE FUTURE DIMENSION IN SPACE. SERIOUSLY, GET A MOVE ON AND GET OUT OF HERE!

"I PULLED IT OUT OF MY THIN AIR!"



THIN AIR! DON'T SAY YOU PULLED SOMETHING OUT OF YOUR BUTT UNLESS YOU MEAN IT'S TRUE! THE MEANING CHANGED WHEN THE CHICKEN AMASSED A BIG ENOUGH BUTT-ARMY!



REALLY? SO **THAT'S** WHY DAD FLIPPED OUT THAT ONE TIME WHEN HE SAID, "THE TRUTH I PULLED OUT OF MY BUTT WILL SET YOU FREE," AND I DIDN'T THINK HE WAS SERIOUS!



SO WHEN YOUR UNCLE MAX CALLED THOSE PEOPLE BRAINWASHED BY THE BUTT-VICEROY "BUTTHEADS," THEY WOULD TAKE IT AS A COMPLIMENT?



MY... **ZHUPARR'S...** MOTHER HAD A SAYING: "IF I PUT A LOADED GUN TO YOUR HEAD, PREDICT YOU'RE GOING TO DIE, AND PULL THE TRIGGER, IT DOESN'T MAKE ME A CLAIRVOYANT." AND SHE'D KNOW! SHE **WAS** A CLAIRVOYANT!



SPEAKING OF TRUTH, MY SARANNA-VISION JUST GAVE ME ANOTHER WARNING, SAYING WE NEED TO LEAVE SOONER RATHER THAN LATER! LET ME DOUBLE-CHECK!



THE TWO MOST LIKELY POSSIBILITIES ARE SUDDENLY A LOT LESS FUZZY! CAN SOMEONE CALL SHAMAN GHEFZARAL? THIS IS IMPORTANT!



LUCKILY, THE SHAMAN WASN'T FAR AWAY, AND A VISION THAT REQUIRED SARANNA TO DROP THE EYEPATCH WAS DEFINITELY IMPORTANT.

I WILL ASSIST YOU WITH MEDITATION, WHICH SHOULD CLEAR THEM UP MORE. WHAT DO THE TWO HAVE IN COMMON, IF ANYTHING?



BOTH OF THEM LEAVE THE CHICKEN GOD DE-THRONED!

GOOD! WHAT OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEM? IN ONE OF THE TWO, HE'S REPLACED BY... SOMEONE... EVEN WORSE!



FOCUS ON YOUR BREATHING, AND ON THE UNIQUE PULSE OF THIS REALITY. SHADOWS ARE NECESSARY, FOR THEY KEEP REALITY FROM BECOMING A HELL OF BLINDING LIGHT. BUT TOO MANY SHADOWS MAKE REALITY A HEAVEN OF SOMETHING DARKNESS AND CONCEAL TOO MUCH. SEEK TRUE BALANCE.

THE SHAMAN WENT ON THAT WAY FOR A BIT LONGER, AND SARANNA, WHO HAD APPARENTLY DONE THIS MEDITATION BEFORE, BREATHED AND CHANTED IN WHAT I FOUND OUT LATER WAS THE GOBLINS' ORIGINAL LANGUAGE. SOON, SHE FOUND WHAT SHE WAS LOOKING FOR.

THE DIFFERENCE LIES IN WHETHER WE GET FOLLOWED!



MY VISION SAYS WE NEED TO GO INTO SPACE. IF WE HAVE FULL STEALTH, AN ENEMY TAKES DOWN THE CHICKEN AND ONE OF HIS UNDERLINGS TAKES OVER!



BUT IF WE DON'T HAVE FULL STEALTH, THAT ENEMY FOLLOWS US, THE CHICKEN WARS WITH ONE OF HIS UNDERLINGS, AND THEIR FIGHT ENDS WITH NEITHER ONE SURVIVING!



OR IS IT BOTH SURVIVING? THAT PARTICULAR SHADOW REFUSES TO MOVE! AND ELDRITCH POWER TAKES DOWN WHOEVER'S IN CHARGE, BUT WHETHER THE WORLD REMAINS LIVABLE DEPENDS ON AN UNLIKELY PARTNERSHIP AT THE RIGHT TIME!



IT'S EXHAUSTING... I NEED TO PUT THE EYEPATCH BACK ON AND TAKE A BREAK!

YOU'VE DONE WELL. I CAN SENSE THE TRUTH OF THIS. REST.



PARDON ME, SHAMAN GHEFZARAL, BUT IF YOU CAN SENSE TRUTH, HOW DID THE CHICKEN ENSLAVE YOUR KIND?



CONSENT CAN BE WEAPONIZED, WITH MANY LOOP-HOLES.

I LOOKED INTO WHAT HE MEANT AFTER THE CHICKEN WAS TAKEN CARE OF. A FEW ORC PHILOSOPHERS WERE MORE THAN WILLING TO FILL ME IN, TOO.

"NO MEANS NO, YES MEANS YES, AND I CAN REVOKE THAT ANYTIME" TURNED INTO "I DON'T HAVE TO SAY YES AND MEAN YES IF I DON'T WANT TO," "I CAN SAY YES AND INSTANTLY CHANGE MY MIND WITHOUT NOTICE," AND "I SAID YES, BUT I CHANGED MY MIND RETROACTIVELY BY SAYING I FELT THREATENED."

THERE WERE EVEN MORE LOOPHOLES THAN THOSE, BUT EX-SHAMAN GHIMZUROS HAD TURNED FINDING WAYS TO FEEL THREATENED INTO AN ART FORM IN HIS LONG GAME OF SELLING HIS OWN PEOPLE TO THE CHICKEN.

A GAME WHICH ENDED WITH HIM SCREAMING AT THE CHICKEN, "YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME! WE HAD A DEAL!" AND A FATE NO ONE WANTED TO DESCRIBE TO ME, FOR BOTH HIM AND HIS FOLLOWERS.



WIZARD SUNFLARE'S INFORMED CONSENT, OR THE GOBLINS' EQUIVALENT OF IT, WAS A MUCH BETTER WAY. BUT THEY COULD ONLY MAKE FULL USE OF IT ONCE THEY WERE NO LONGER SLAVES, AND IT WAS MY JOB TO MAKE SURE THAT CAME TO BE.



THE VERY END OF THE DEBRIEFING WAS INTERRUPTED. SHAMAN, IF YOU ARE DONE, I MUST CONTINUE WITH IT.



I AM. DO YOUR DUTY WELL, ZUNG.

YOUR GUIDE IS PROPERLY SECURED, AND HAS BEEN FOR SEVERAL YEARS: PRISONER X-747. I WILL ESCORT YOU TO HIS CELL UNDER COVER OF NIGHT, BUT NIGHTFALL WON'T BE FOR SOME HOURS.



GIVEN ERIS' LAST MESSAGE TO CALVIN, AND THE OTHER MAIN PART OF MY VISION, CALVIN NEEDS TO MAKE HIS OWN DEAL WITH THE SNOW DEMONS FOR EVERYTHING TO WORK OUT!



NO OFFENSE, SUPER-HOBBS, BUT YOU CAN'T BE IN MULTIPLE PLACES AT ONCE, AND WE NEED MULTIPLE FIGHTERS TO WIN THIS WAR!



NO PROBLEM. I... WE STILL GET TO HELP SAVE THE WORLD!

I'LL PASS ON WORD TO THE GREMLIN ENGINEERS TO MAKE THE LAST ZARNIUM-COATED PART FOR THE SHIP, BUT TO NOT SWAP IT OUT UNTIL THE TRIP OFFWORLD IS DONE.



HE LEFT US IN THE DEBRIEFING ROOM, AND WAS BACK WITHIN MINUTES.

PRISONER X-747 HAS BEEN INFORMED OF THIS, AND HE WISHES TO MEET THOSE HE WILL BE GUIDING. THAT WILL ALSO HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL NIGHTFALL.



WE WAITED FOR NIGHTFALL. IT HAD BEEN A WEIRD DAY, AND WE WEREN'T ALL THAT HUNGRY DUE TO THE MEALS SARANNA AND I HAD EATEN AT MCZARGALD'S. BUT THE INFIRMARY INSISTED ON OUR EATING ON SCHEDULE, AND DELIVERED OUR MEALS ANYWAY.

SO MINESTRONE SOUP FOR US BOTH? ...WAIT, I FEEL THAT PRESENCE AGAIN...



THE FLYING SPAGHETTI MONSTER TURNED MY MINESTRONE SOUP INTO RAVIOLI. AFTER SOME TALK WITH HEALER GHOLZOMPUS, BOTH IT AND SARANNA'S MINESTRONE SOUP WERE DONATED TO OTHER PATIENTS WHO ACTUALLY WERE SICK AND COULD STOMACH THEM.

SARANNA'S BEING ABLE TO SENSE THE UPCOMING CHANGE ON HER OWN CAME IN HANDY LATER. IN THE MEANTIME, ALL WE COULD DO WAS KEEP WAITING.

BOTH ZHUPARR AND HOBBS HADN'T EATEN IN A WHILE BEFORE I'D SUMMONED THEM, SO SUPER-HOBBS GLEEFULLY ATE HIS SOUP.



THEN NIGHTFALL ARRIVED. IT'S TIME. FOLLOW ME. THE PASSAGEWAY WE NEED IS THIS WAY.



ZUNG LED US THROUGH A SERIES OF HIDDEN DOORWAYS, PROCEEDING DEEPER AND DEEPER. FINALLY, HE STOPPED AT A CLEARLY MARKED DOOR.

THE BORDER OF THE DUNGEON IS ABOVE US. THE GREMLIN ENGINEERS BEYOND IT ARE PUTTING THE FINISHING TOUCHES ON THE SHIP.



ZUNG, YOU'RE EARLY! WE GOT THE ORDERS TO NOT MAKE THE SHIP FULL STEALTH, AND X-747 HAS VERIFIED THAT IT SHOULD FLY PROPERLY! WHY THE RUSH WHEN WE'VE WAITED SO LONG ALREADY?



ZORL, WE HAVE NEW REASON TO BELIEVE THAT TIMING IS CRITICAL, AND I AND MY CHARGES GOT HERE A LITTLE EARLY FOR THAT REASON. BY THE HUMAN DEFINITION OF NIGHTFALL, WE'RE RIGHT ON TIME.



THE HUMAN DEFINITION OF NIGHTFALL?

DUNGEON GOBLINS CAN SEE BETTER IN DARKNESS, SO THEY DON'T CONSIDER IT NIGHTFALL UNTIL IT'S DARK BY THEIR STANDARD!



BY TIGER AND DEMON STANDARDS, IT'S NOT REALLY NIGHTFALL YET EITHER.



THE SHIP HAS PASSED INSPECTIONS, PEER REVIEWS, AND DEFECT TRACKING.

SO IT'S FINALLY READY. X-747 SHOULD BE HAPPY.

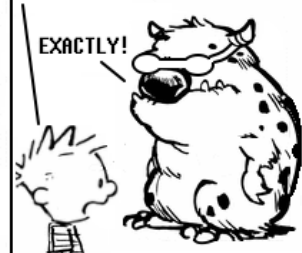


I DIDN'T KNOW SO MANY GOBLINS COULD FIT IN ONE PLACE!

AS GREMLINS, THEIR MAGICAL TETHERS ARE GENERALLY WEAK ENOUGH TO NOT BAR THEM FROM LEAVING THE DUNGEON!



AND WE'RE ALL UNDERGROUND BUT OUTSIDE OF IT IN... IS THIS A BIG HANGAR?



AND WE MAY NOT ANSWER TO THE PRISONER, BUT I DISLIKE THE NECESSITY OF HAVING TO KEEP A PRISONER. IF CIRCUMSTANCES WERE NOT WHAT THEY WERE...

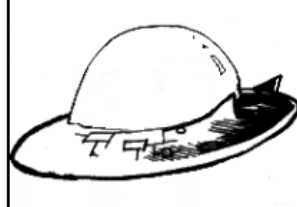


I CAN SEE WHY, ZULK. I DIDN'T KNOW YOU MADE THE ENGINEERING CORPS UNTIL NOW! CONGRATULATIONS!

THANK YOU! ALL THAT WORK PAID OFF!



THERE IS THE SHIP. WE HAVE A ZARNIUM-COATED SPATIAL FROBNICATOR FOR WHEN FULL STEALTH IS NEEDED. BUT IT'S NOT INSTALLED, PER OUR INSTRUCTIONS.



AND X-747 IS COMING. AFTER THIS, I FINALLY GET TO GO HOME, YES?



WHO ARE YOU, EXACTLY?

I AM KRALTAR. I'VE BEEN HERE LONG ENOUGH FOR THESE GOBLINS TO LEARN MY SHIP AND REPAIR IT FOR A MISSION. HUH!



A MISSION THAT THEY HAVE BEEN VAGUE ABOUT, ASIDE FROM SAYING FRIENDS OF A FRIEND WOULD BE INVOLVED!

CALVIN AND I DEALT WITH DINOSAURS SOMETIMES, BUT YOU'RE SOMETHING ELSE!

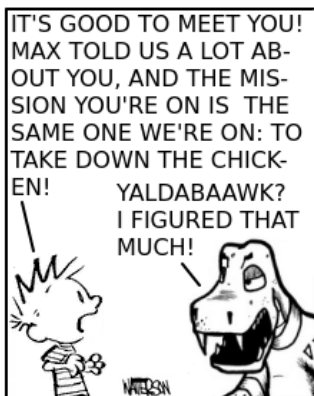


CALVIN, AS IN MAX'S NEPHEW? I AT LEAST KNOW THAT NAME! WHO ARE YOU OTHERS?

I'M SARANNA, AND THAT'S SUPER-HOBBS THE... DEMON-TIGER. WE'RE CALVIN'S FRIENDS!



I WAS STILL PROCESSING IT ALL. SO THIS WAS KRALTAR: THE ONE WHOSE POWER OF SUPER-BLASPHEMY HAD MADE THE CHICKEN KILL SARANNA'S SISTER INSTEAD OF HER ("IF YOU GIVE A GOD A MIGRAINE, HE MIGHT INFECT THE WRONG TWIN WITH ARJENFLORB SYNDROME."), AND WHO'D SAVED MY UNCLE FROM BEING MADE A POOP GHOST ("GREATER LOVE HATH NO ONE THAN THIS, THAT A MAN MERCY-KILL, EAT, AND POOP OUT HIS FRIEND BEFORE AN EVIL GOD CAN DO THOSE THINGS FIRST AND SILENCE HIS FRIEND'S GHOST."). IT WAS A LOT.

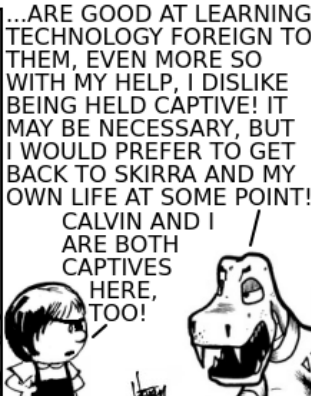


IT'S GOOD TO MEET YOU! MAX TOLD US A LOT ABOUT YOU, AND THE MISSION YOU'RE ON IS THE SAME ONE WE'RE ON: TO TAKE DOWN THE CHICKEN!

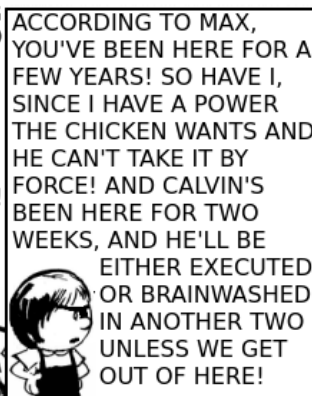
YALDABAABW? I FIGURED THAT MUCH!



I'VE BEEN KEPT HERE BECAUSE AN FTL SPACE-CRAFT CAPABLE OF ESCAPING THE SOLAR SYSTEM IS ONE WAY TO ESCAPE HIS AND HIS ARCHONS, AND IT NEEDED TO BE REPAIRED AND KEPT SECRET! WHILE THESE GOBLINS, OR GREMLINS, OR WHATEVER THEY CALL THEMSELVES...



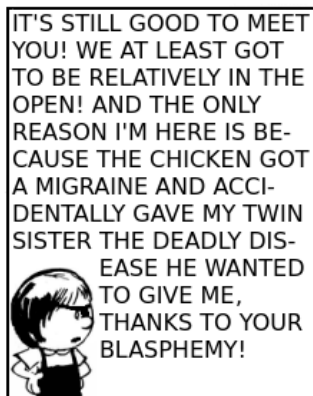
...ARE GOOD AT LEARNING TECHNOLOGY FOREIGN TO THEM, EVEN MORE SO WITH MY HELP, I DISLIKE BEING HELD CAPTIVE! IT MAY BE NECESSARY, BUT I WOULD PREFER TO GET BACK TO SKIRRA AND MY OWN LIFE AT SOME POINT! CALVIN AND I ARE BOTH CAPTIVES HERE, TOO!



ACCORDING TO MAX, YOU'VE BEEN HERE FOR A FEW YEARS! SO HAVE I, SINCE I HAVE A POWER THE CHICKEN WANTS AND HE CAN'T TAKE IT BY FORCE! AND CALVIN'S BEEN HERE FOR TWO WEEKS, AND HE'LL BE EITHER EXECUTED OR BRAINWASHED IN ANOTHER TWO UNLESS WE GET OUT OF HERE!



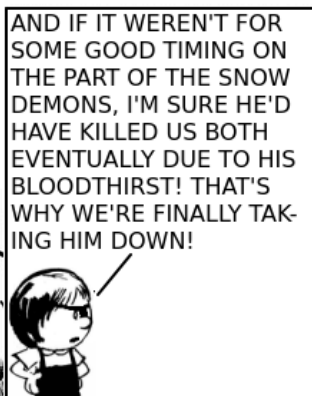
IN THIS SHIP WITH ITS ENHANCED STEALTH, YES? ITS NATIVE STEALTH MODE IS APPARENTLY INADEQUATE DUE TO NEW TRICKS THE CHICKEN HAS LEARNED, AND THE GOBLINS, BEING FEY, HAVE THEIR OWN WAYS TO ACCOMPLISH THAT!



IT'S STILL GOOD TO MEET YOU! WE AT LEAST GOT TO BE RELATIVELY IN THE OPEN! AND THE ONLY REASON I'M HERE IS BECAUSE THE CHICKEN GOT A MIGRAINE AND ACCIDENTALLY GAVE MY TWIN SISTER THE DEADLY DISEASE HE WANTED TO GIVE ME, THANKS TO YOUR BLASPHEMY!



MY CONDOLENCES. MY INDUCED MIGRAINE SHOULD HAVE BEEN STRONG ENOUGH TO KNOCK HIM OUT, BUT... DON'T WORRY! YOU DIDN'T KILL HER, THE CHICKEN DID!

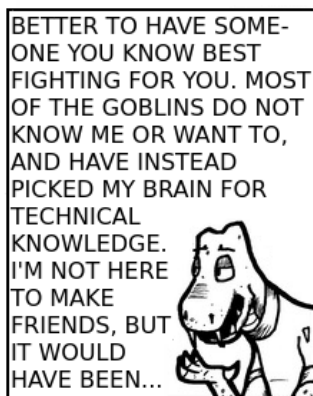


AND IF IT WEREN'T FOR SOME GOOD TIMING ON THE PART OF THE SNOW DEMONS, I'M SURE HE'D HAVE KILLED US BOTH EVENTUALLY DUE TO HIS BLOODTHIRST! THAT'S WHY WE'RE FINALLY TAKING HIM DOWN!

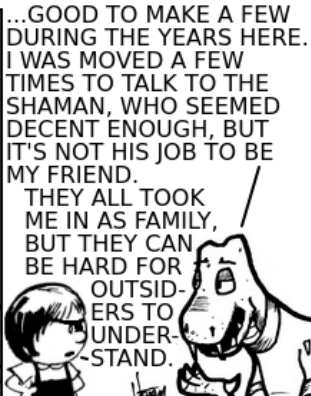


AND CALVIN JUST SUMMONED ME BECAUSE HE WANTED HIS OLD FRIEND BACK, AND BECAUSE HE NEEDED SOMEONE WHO COULD FIGHT ON HIS SIDE!

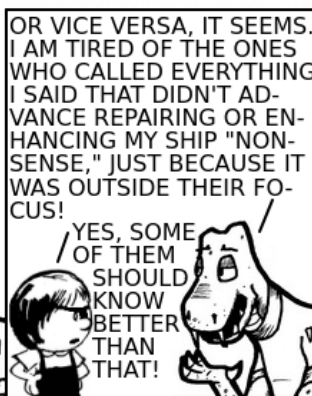
I CAN FIGHT AS WELL, BUT I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN.



BETTER TO HAVE SOMEONE YOU KNOW BEST FIGHTING FOR YOU. MOST OF THE GOBLINS DO NOT KNOW ME OR WANT TO, AND HAVE INSTEAD PICKED MY BRAIN FOR TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE. I'M NOT HERE TO MAKE FRIENDS, BUT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN...



...GOOD TO MAKE A FEW DURING THE YEARS HERE. I WAS MOVED A FEW TIMES TO TALK TO THE SHAMAN, WHO SEEMED DECENT ENOUGH, BUT IT'S NOT HIS JOB TO BE MY FRIEND. THEY ALL TOOK ME IN AS FAMILY, BUT THEY CAN BE HARD FOR OUTSIDERS TO UNDERSTAND.



OR VICE VERSA, IT SEEMS. I AM TIRED OF THE ONES WHO CALLED EVERYTHING I SAID THAT DIDN'T ADVANCE REPAIRING OR ENHANCING MY SHIP "NONSENSE," JUST BECAUSE IT WAS OUTSIDE THEIR FOCUS! YES, SOME OF THEM SHOULD KNOW BETTER THAN THAT!



BY THE WAY, IT'S GOOD TO MEET YOU, TOO! IT'S STILL A BIT CONFUSING HAVING TWO MINDS!

AH! I COULD SENSE THAT YOUR DEMONIC NATURE WAS A BIT DILUTED! NO OFFENSE!



MY PEOPLE HAD TO FIGHT BOTH DEMONS AND OTHER CELESTIALS ENOUGH THAT WE DEVELOPED A WAY TO SENSE BOTH, EVEN WHEN THEY HID. AND THE CHICKEN WOULD NEVER WORK WITH A DEMON OF ANY KIND, GIVEN HIS BLACK-AND-WHITE THINKING!



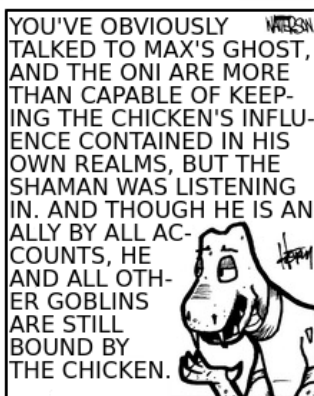
THE ENGINE IS FINALLY DONE INITIALIZING. IF YOU'RE DONE WITH INTRODUCTIONS, YOU SHOULD GO SOON. IT'S BEEN FASCINATING HAVING YOU HERE!

THANK YOU, ZULK. YOU'VE BEEN GOOD TO ME, AT LEAST!

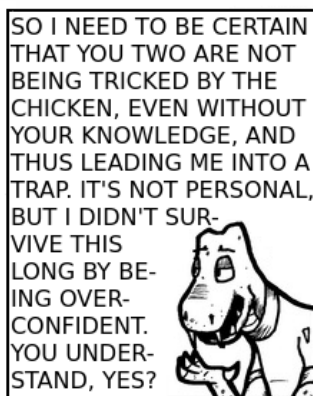


I'LL LOOK YOU UP WHEN THIS WAR'S OVER! BUT I MUST DO ONE LAST THING. I NEED TO MAKE SURE CALVIN AND SARANNA AREN'T AGENTS OF THE CHICKEN, EVEN INADVERTENTLY!

I LOOK FORWARD TO IT! AND THAT'S GOOD SENSE!



YOU'VE OBVIOUSLY TALKED TO MAX'S GHOST, AND THE ONI ARE MORE THAN CAPABLE OF KEEPING THE CHICKEN'S INFLUENCE CONTAINED IN HIS OWN REALMS, BUT THE SHAMAN WAS LISTENING IN. AND THOUGH HE IS AN ALLY BY ALL ACCOUNTS, HE AND ALL OTHER GOBLINS ARE STILL BOUND BY THE CHICKEN.



SO I NEED TO BE CERTAIN THAT YOU TWO ARE NOT BEING TRICKED BY THE CHICKEN, EVEN WITHOUT YOUR KNOWLEDGE, AND THUS LEADING ME INTO A TRAP. IT'S NOT PERSONAL, BUT I DIDN'T SURVIVE THIS LONG BY BEING OVERCONFIDENT. YOU UNDERSTAND, YES?



WAIT, THERE WAS THAT SONG HE SAID HE TOLD YOU ABOUT! HOW DID IT GO?

♪ HE HAD A GROUND-HOG, SAID HIS NAME WAS FRED. TOLD ME IF I DIDN'T GIVE HIM MY SOUL, THE GROUNDHOG SOON WOULD BE DEAD. ♪

AND SO WE BEGAN OUR SOMEWHAT MANGLED VERSION OF "THE BALLAD OF SATAN'S GROUNDHOG."



THE CHICKEN'S RECENT MUSIC HOUR HAD SCRAMBLED MY MEMORY OF THE SONG A BIT (IT WASN'T ABOUT A WOODCHUCK NAMED TED), BUT I COULD REMEMBER OTHER PARTS OF IT.

RIGHT! AND THE BIT NEAR THE END!

♪ HE SAID, "YOU CAN'T COME IN UNLESS YOU'VE GOT A GROUND-HOG!" I SAID, "SON, THAT'S WHAT I'VE BEEN TRYIN' TO TELL YOU ALL A LONG!" ♪

AND SUPER-HOBBS HARMONIZED ON THE BITS ABOUT SATAN THAT WE COULD REMEMBER.

SATAN... SATAN...



SOON, KRALTAR STOPPED US.

GOOD! THAT'S DEFINITELY MAX'S SONG! AND YOUR ABILITY TO SPEAK, OR EVEN THINK, SATAN'S NAME PROVES THAT THE CHICKEN DOESN'T BIND YOU!

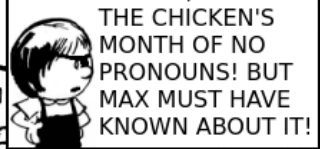
HE'S AN UNPERSON NOW? SINCE WHEN?



SINCE SOMETIME AFTER I WAS BROUGHT HERE. I WAS TELLING ZULK WHAT I KNEW OF THE WORLD BEYOND THIS DUNGEON, OR EVEN THIS REALITY, AND I FOUND THAT HE WAS SUDDENLY UNABLE TO UNDERSTAND MY ACCOUNT OF CHRISTIANITY BEFORE THE CHICKEN CAME!

GOING FROM ENEMY TO UNPERSON IS A BIG CHANGE! HE MUST HAVE GOTTEN SUPREMELY CONFIDENT! THE LAST UNPEOPLE I REMEMBER HEARING ABOUT WERE "RUFUS XAVIER SARSAPARILLA" AND A FEW OTHERS, DURING

THE CHICKEN'S MONTH OF NO PRONOUNS! BUT MAX MUST HAVE KNOWN ABOUT IT!



AND NOW THAT YOU KNOW I'M NOT WORKING FOR THE CHICKEN, YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT HE ACTUALLY HAS BEEN WORKING WITH DEMONS: MOST OF THE REST OF MY KIND, BUT NOT BY THEIR CHOICE! AND SOME OF THEM WERE LISTENING, TOO!



I'M ONE OF THE FEW WHO ESCAPED HIM. IT'S

ONE OF THE REASONS I'M HELPING CALVIN! THE OTHER IS THAT THE OTHER HALF OF ME IS CALVIN'S BEST FRIEND!



I STAND CORRECTED. YALDABAABW APPARENTLY NOW BELIEVES HE IS INVINCIBLE, OR CLOSE ENOUGH TO IT TO START BREAKING HIS MOST STRONGLY HELD PRINCIPLES WHEN HE THINKS DOING SO WILL GIVE HIM AN ADVANTAGE. IT IS A SIGN OF HIS DECLINE!

HE'S ALSO STARTED CUTTING HIS PRISONERS' SENTENCES SHORT, WHICH IS WHY WE NEED TO ESCAPE HIM EVEN SOONER THAN WE THOUGHT! BEFORE HE DOES IT TO CALVIN!



THE GOBLINS HERE DO TALK ABOUT WHAT GOES ON AROUND HERE. THE PREVAILING THEORY IS THAT THE ORC CHIEF'S EARLY DEATH WILL CAUSE LESS PAIN IN THE LONG RUN.



I KNOW LITTLE ABOUT ORCS, BUT THEIR CHIEFS KEEP TRACK OF MATINGS AND MARRIAGES WITHIN THE CLAN. THERE ARE SEVERAL MALE ORCS WITH HUSBANDS AND

FEMALE ORCS WITH WIVES, AND A FEW WHO'VE USED MAGIC TO CHANGE GENDERS IN...



...THE KOTEK CLAN MEMBERS HERE, AND THE CHIEF KEEPS ALL THE RECORDS IN HIS HEAD. WITH HIS EXECUTION, THE CLAN ONLY HAS TO KEEP THOSE NON-CONSERVATIVE MEMBERS SECRET FOR A BIT LONGER, AND THEN THEY ONLY GET EXECUTED WITHOUT FACING WORSE BEFOREHAND!

SO HE TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE CHICKEN'S BAD MOOD TO SACRIFICE HIMSELF TO MAKE SURE THEY GET THE EASIEST POSSIBLE DEATH? THAT FITS WITH WHAT I KNOW OF ORCS! JUST LIKE CHENDARR THE BARBARIAN!



IT'S FORTUNATE THAT ORCS ARE STILL FEY AND IMMUNE TO THE CHICKEN'S MIND-READING, AND THAT THIS PLACE IS OUTSIDE THE DUNGEON AND SO DOESN'T SET OFF THE

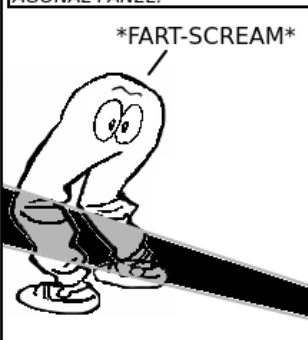


ALL FOUR OF US PACKED INTO THE SHIP, WITH KRALTAR IN THE PILOT'S SEAT. HE WAS UNHAPPY AT NOT HAVING FULL ENHANCED STEALTH, BUT THE POSSIBILITY OF THE CHICKEN'S BEING REPLACED WITH AN EVEN WORSE ENTITY CONVINCED HIM IT WAS NECESSARY.

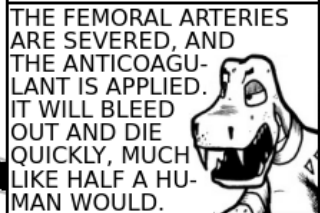
THE HANGAR OPENED AT THE TOP, REVEALING THE NIGHT SKY. WE WERE SO CLOSE TO REALLY GETTING OUT OF THE DUNGEON.

BUT, JUST AS KRALTAR HADN'T ANTICIPATED EVERYTHING IN TERMS OF SECURITY, NO ONE ANTICIPATED THAT ONE OF THE BUTT-SERVANTS WAS RIGHT OUTSIDE THE HANGAR.

KRALTAR WAS READY, THOUGH, AND FIDDLING WITH A RED HEXAGONAL PANEL.



THE BEAM MOVED UPWARD, PULSATED, AND SHEARED THE BUTT-SERVANT'S LEGS OFF AT THE THIGHS. BLOOD POURED OUT OF THE OPEN WOUNDS AS THEIR VOICE FADED AND THEY COLLAPSED. AFTER A FEW SECONDS, KRALTAR DIMMED THE VIEWSCREEN SO WE DIDN'T HAVE TO WITNESS EVERYTHING.



KRALTAR THEN SWITCHED TO FIDDLING WITH A PURPLE HEXAGONAL PANEL. WE STILL COULDN'T SEE ANYTHING, BUT THE BEAM-FIRING SOUND CHANGED TO A LOWER FREQUENCY.

THERE ARE NO MORE LIFE SIGNS FROM IT. I AM TRACTORING ITS REMAINS INTO THE EMERGENCY COMPARTMENT TO AVOID LEAVING ANY TRACE.



NOW SCANNING THE REMAINS. STANDARD BONE STRUCTURE, SO NOT ONE OF THE ENHANCED BUTT-SOLDIERS. AND, FOR THE RECORD, ON THE BACK OF THE REVERSE-PELVIS-SKULL, A BAUBELLUM,

NOT A BACULUM OR ANYTHING IN BETWEEN, SO NOT AN IT, A SHE, AT LEAST BIOLOGICALLY.



I THINK I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO UNDERSTOOD ALL THAT, SINCE KILLING IS SO GROUNDED IN THE LIBERAL ARTS FOR BOTH TIGERS AND DEMONS! WE ONLY HAD TO FIGHT A FEW, BUT THEY WERE ENOUGH.



I ALSO FIND IT MUCH EASIER TO REMEMBER SOME PROCEDURES IF I SAY THEM OUT LOUD WHILE DOING THEM, AND WE CANNOT AFFORD TO FAIL THIS MISSION. IN SHORT, THE THREAT IS GONE.



I WOULD USUALLY REMOVE A FRAGMENT FOR WHATEVER DEATH CUSTOMS ITS OWNER WOULD REQUIRE, AND PUT THE REST INTO THE SHIP BIOCONVERTER TO MAKE MORE EKAFUEL. BUT FROM WHAT I HEAR, YOU ARE MAKING USE OF ELDRITCH POWER.



AND SUCH REMAINS CAN BE USEFUL FOR SUCH, YES? ALTHOUGH I'M NOT THAT FAMILIAR WITH THEM.
I AM... ZHU-PARR IS! AND FOES' REMAINS DEFINITELY ARE!



I'LL KEEP THEM WHERE THEY ARE FOR NOW, THEN. ELDRITCH POWER CAPABLE OF TAKING DOWN YALDABAARK OBVIOUSLY TAKES PRIORITY.
THANKS. I STILL HAVE A LOT TO LEARN, THOUGH!
SO DO WE ALL!



HOW CAN YOU THREE BE SO CALM WHEN WE JUST AVOIDED GETTING CAUGHT BY SUCH A TINY MARGIN?! MY VISION IS STILL UNCLEAR ON EXACTLY WHO FOLLOWS US AND SOLIDIFIES THE RIGHT FUTURE!



I'VE HAD TRAINING TO DEAL WITH IT, JUST AS SUPER-HOBBS, OR HIS ZHUPARR HALF, APPARENTLY HAS. YOU AND CALVIN NEED TIME TO PROCESS IT, ALONG WITH ALL THE OTHER THINGS YOU'VE EXPERIENCED, EVEN IF CALVIN SEEMS TO HANDLE IT FOR NOW.



GIVE ME A MOMENT TO GET US FAR ENOUGH AWAY FROM THE HANGAR. AS FOR WHERE WE GO AFTER THAT, ALL I HAVE HEARD FROM BOTH THE GOBLINS AND YOU SUGGEST THAT WE NEED TO FIND A PLACE OF SPIRITUAL AND MAGICAL LEARNING TO SUCCEED.



ONE OUTSIDE THIS SOLAR SYSTEM, TO PUT IT OUT OF THE REACH OF YALDABAARK OR ANY OF HIS ARCHONS, BUT WITHIN THIS REALITY, SINCE OTHER REALITIES' WAYS MAY NOT MATCH THIS ONE CLOSELY AND SO WILL NOT HELP YOU IN THIS PARTICULAR QUEST.



SARANNA COMPOSED HERSELF, AND SPOKE UP AGAIN.
CALVIN'S PLAN IS TO MAKE A DEAL WITH THE SNOW DEMONS, MUCH LIKE HOW I DID! BUT HE'S AIMING FOR OFFENSIVE POWER TO TAKE DOWN THE CHICKEN GOD, INSTEAD OF VISION LIKE MINE!



THAT NARROWS IT DOWN NICELY TO ONE WORLD IN PARTICULAR: ZARTOK-3. THE COORDINATES FOR IT ARE IN THE SHIP MEMORY BANKS ALREADY, AND WE SHOULD GET GOING THAT WAY BEFORE ANY OTHER AGENTS OF THE CHICKEN SHOW UP HERE.



IT WILL TAKE NEARLY SIX DAYS TO LEAVE THE SOLAR SYSTEM AT LIGHT SPEED, PLUS SLIGHTLY OVER ONE DAY TO REACH ZARTOK-3, SO ROUGHLY A WEEK IN TOTAL. THE FTL DRIVE, AT FULL CAPACITY, CAN CUT THAT DOWN TO ROUGHLY FIFTEEN HOURS.



SUDDENLY, I WAS FREAKED OUT.
RUNNING AT MAXIMUM CAPACITY? DOES THAT HAVE A HIGH RISK OF BREAKING DOWN? WHAT WILL WE DO FOR A WEEK IF THAT HAPPENS? AND WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE FOLLOWED ANYWAY!



THE FTL DRIVE HAS BEEN STRESS-TESTED AND QUADRUPLE-CHECKED, AND EVEN WITH THE GOBLINS' MODIFICATIONS, THAT SHOULD NOT HAPPEN. IT'S THE ONE THING I CAN BE REASONABLY SURE OF.



KRALTAR WORKED THE CONTROLS SOME MORE, AND THEN ENGAGED THE FTL DRIVE. THE SHIP FINALLY STARTED ITS LONG JOURNEY OUT OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM.

BWEGZORRRM!



NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS BEFORE!

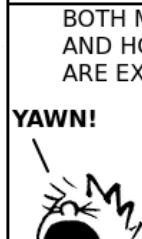


NEITHER HAVE I!

WOW!

HYPERSPACE WAS... INDESCRIBABLY BEAUTIFUL, SOMEHOW.

ALTHOUGH THE FACT THAT IT WAS EVENING CAUGHT UP WITH EVERYONE BUT KRALTAR SOON ENOUGH.



BOTH MY ZHUPARR AND HOBBS HALVES ARE EXHAUSTED...

YAWN!



SARANNA WAS THE LAST TO FALL ASLEEP.

I CAN'T STAY AWAKE MUCH LONGER, BUT HOW CAN THE CHICKEN GOD TRACK US?

THE EFFECTS OF THIS KIND OF FTL DRIVE, PLUS THE THREADS OF PROPHECY.



SUCH THREADS FOLLOW ALL THOSE INVOLVED IN PROPHECIES, BUT THE AMOUNT OF POWER REQUIRED TO FULLY PERCEIVE THEM IS STAGGERING, SO I BELIEVE IT TO BE AN ACCEPTABLE RISK.



IF YOU SAY SO. GOOD NIGHT!



I EXPECTED TO HAVE ANOTHER NIGHTMARE, BUT IF I DID, I DON'T REMEMBER IT. I ONLY HOPED THE CHICKEN WOULDN'T CARE ABOUT OUR ESCAPE UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE TO EFFECTIVELY STOP US.

AND BY NOT CARING, I MEANT EITHER THE STANDARD VERSION OR THE VERSION DAD, AND TO A LESSER EXTENT, MOM USED (NAMELY, ON THE BRIEFEST MENTION OF SOMETHING, RANTING ABOUT IT FOR ABOUT FIVE MINUTES AND THEN ASSERTING THEY DIDN'T CARE ABOUT IT). BECAUSE EITHER WAY WOULD SLOW HIM DOWN, AND THE LATTER VERSION LIKELY CAME STRAIGHT FROM HIM ANYWAY.

WE ALL WOKE UP ABOUT TWELVE HOURS LATER. SARANNA TOLD US WHAT KRALTAR HAD SAID ABOUT THE THREADS OF PROPHECY, AND I WONDERED OUT LOUD HOW FAR THE CHICKEN WOULD GO. WE'D ALL FIND OUT SOON ENOUGH.



GOOD TO KNOW, BUT I'M GOING BACK TO SLEEP! I'LL REALLY NEED MY STRENGTH TO PRACTICE ALL MY ELDRITCH POWERS SOON!

THE REST OF THE TRIP WAS UNEVENTFUL. TOWARD THE VERY END OF IT, SARANNA TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK ONE QUESTION.

KRALTAR? MAX TOLD US ABOUT SOME OF THE CONVERSATIONS YOU HAD, SO... WOULD YOU KNOW WHAT THE "H" IN "JESUS H. CHRIST" REALLY STANDS FOR?



YES, ACTUALLY! IT'S COMPLEX...
IT WAS.

...AND THEN YAHWEH YELLED AT JESUS FOR BECOMING INVOLVED WITH A NEWLY ASCENDED GOD WHO COULD TAKE THE FORM OF AN ATTACK HELICOPTER, AS WELL AS FOR MAKING THAT GOD'S FULL NAME PART OF HIS OWN. HE SEALED UP THE TIME BARRIER TO BAR JESUS' RETURN TO THE FUTURE, AND DECREED...



...THAT NO ONE SHOULD CALL HIM "JESUS HORATIO HELICOPTER CHRIST" EVER AGAIN, ONLY "JESUS H CHRIST," AND THAT THE H STOOD FOR ONLY "H." WHEN THE CHILDREN'S SONG ABOUT IT STARTED IN THE FUTURE, HE INTERVENED TO CHANGE IT TO "JOHN JACOB JINGLEHEIMER SCHMIDT" TO KEEP UP APPEARANCES.



SO THAT IS WHY GODS ARE USUALLY BARRED FROM TIME TRAVEL, WHAT THE "H" IN JESUS H CHRIST ACTUALLY STANDS FOR VERSUS WHAT IT'S CLAIMED TO STAND FOR, WHAT CHRISTIANITY'S SECRET COMMANDMENTS 0 AND -1 ARE, AND EXACTLY HOW I DISCOVERED IT ALL WHILE HELPING AN EXILED GOD ESCAPE YOUR WORLD. IT IS INTERESTING, YES?



HUH! BUT WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO ATTEND THERAPY SESSIONS IN THE FUTURE? AND WHY AREN'T OTHER GODS ABLE TO OPEN THE TIME BARRIER AFTER YAHWEH SEALED IT?

AND WHY SUCH DISLIKE FOR HELICOPTERS?



AND HELICOPTERS WERE INVENTED AFTER THE "JOHN JACOB JINGLEHEIMER SMITH" SONG STARTED UP! DID THE TIMELINE GET BROKEN DUE TO YAHWEH'S MEDDLING THE SAME WAY IT DID FROM THE CHICKEN GOD'S MEDDLING LATER?



YES. IT WAS A COMBINATION OF THE TIMELINE'S BEING BROKEN AND HORATIO HELICOPTER'S BEING A TIME TRAVELER HIMSELF. AND AFTER YAHWEH SEALED THE TIME BARRIER, IT WAS REINFORCED BY ONI AGENTS. TIMELINES CAN NOW BE CHANGED ONLY INDIRECTLY, BY DAMAGING OTHER PARTS OF A GIVEN REALITY.



YAHWEH HARDENED JESUS' HEART AGAINST THE EXILED GOD, AS I SAID. AS FOR WHY HE HOLDS A GRUDGE AGAINST ATT...

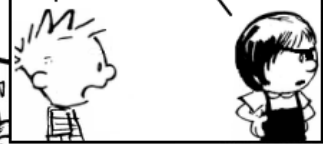
PING!

THAT SOUND MEANS WE HAVE ARRIVED AT THE SANCTUARY. IF YOU TWO WOULD WAKE UP SUPER-HOBBS?



CAN DO! SORRY WE HAVE TO CUT THIS SHORT!

WE CAN FILL HIM IN ON THIS STORY LATER!



I KNEW SUPER-HOBBS BEST, SO I WOKE HIM UP. SARANNA MUSED A BIT MORE WHILE I DID IT.

HOW OFFENDED MUST YAHWEH HAVE BEEN THAT JESUS WAS USING HIS TITLE AS A SURNAME DURING THAT TIME? AND HOW ELSE WOULD YOU OFFEND HIM THAT MUCH?



ELSEWHERE, AS IF TO ANSWER HER QUESTION...

SO THOUGHTLESS! MY EX-LOVE GOES OFF ABOUT HIS STOCK OF NUCLEAR MISSILES PLUNGING INTO INFIDELS, BUT NEVER THINKS OF MY THREE HEAT-SEEKING MOISTURE MISSILES PLUNGING INTO HIM ANYMORE!



AND HE NAMED HIS HEAVEN COCK-AYNE, AFTER BOTH OF US, SO HE SAID! BUT HIS NAME CAME FIRST, AS ALWAYS! WHY NOT PUT ME FIRST AND NAME IT AYNE-COCK? AT LEAST I TRACKED DOWN A FEW OF MY ANGEL DESERTERS AND REABSORBED ALL THEIR POWER? FOR ME TO WIN, THEY MUST LOSE!

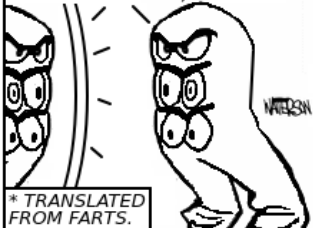


("UHHH... STILL SO WEAK. I DON'T KNOW WHY THEY COMPLAINED BEFORE I HOLLOWED THEM OUT! THEY HAD NO RIGHT TO! THEY'RE MY SERVANTS! I'M THE IMPORTANT ONE! I'M THEIR KING!")*



* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.

("AND WE... I, THE ONE AND ONLY TRIPLE BUTT, WILL BE KING OF KINGS AGAIN SOON! YES, MIRROR, THINGS WILL BE SET RIGHT AGAIN!")*



* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.

BWARRK! BWARRK! ("WHAT? NOT THAT ALARM! SOMEONE ON EARTH USED UNSHIELDED CEL-DINO TECHNOLOGY WITHIN THE LAST TWELVE HOURS! I CAN TURN THIS TO MY ADVANTAGE!")*



* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.

("MY EX-LOVE IS TOO BOUND TO THIS WORLD TO GO AFTER SUCH THINGS HIMSELF. I'M NOT, BUT IT WOULD BE TOO SUSPICIOUS IF I DID SO! ESPECIALLY IF IT TURNS OUT TO BE RELATED TO A PROPHECY, WHICH I'LL HAVE TO CHECK!")*



* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.

SOON...
RING RING

♪THE HOLY, HOLY, HOLY ONE IS CALLING...♪
AH, MY TRUE LORD'S RING-TONE!



SOON AFTER THAT... ("YALDABAAWK, MY LORD! YALDY-WALDY, MY BELOVED LORDY-WORDY! DID YOU HEAR THE CEL-DINO TECH ALARM GO OFF? IT IS ALSO TIED TO A PROPHECY THAT COULD BRING YOUR DOWNFALL! I TOOK INITIATIVE AND CALLED ARPHAXAD!")*

* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.

CEL-DINO TECH? AFTER ALL THESE YEARS? AND THERE'S A PROPHECY INVOLVED, TOO? TELL ME OF IT, MY LOVE, AND THEN SEND ARPHAXAD IN!



AFTER THE EXPLANATION... I WAS SUPPOSED TO TAKE STOCK IN THE OLD PROPHECY'S ALMANAC? I THOUGHT IT WAS ALL HOGWASH BY NOW! AND IF THAT NANO-BRAINED GUN GNOME HAD BEEN ABLE TO AIM, IT WOULD ALL BE MOOT! STILL, YOU'VE DONE WELL! TAKE THE DAY OFF, OR HAVE THE NEW BUTT-RECRUITS SLAUGHTER SOMETHING, I DON'T CARE! WHERE IS ARPHAXAD NOW?



("AS YOU WISH, LORD. ARPHAXAD IS OUTSIDE THE DOOR. I GUESS I'LL GO SATISFY MYSELF WITH THAT CYLINDRICAL ASTEROID I FOUND ON MY LAST OUTING INTO SPACE!")*

GOOD! PROPHECY BREAKING AWAITS!



* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.

SOON AFTER THAT...
MY LORD, WHAT EXACTLY IS THIS? IT LOOKS LIKE A PROPHECY FROM THE OLD PROPHECY'S ALMANAC!

I DISCOVERED, ENTIRELY ON MY OWN, THAT THIS PROPHECY APPLIES TO ME, YOU, AND TWO PRISONERS WHO RECENTLY ESCAPED THE DUNGEON, ONE OF WHOM IS YOUR SON! MY GREAT POWER OVER THIS WORLD BINDS ME TOO STRONGLY TO IT TO LEAVE IT!

AND THAT IS WHY I NEED YOU! YOUR OTHER RELATIVES TURNED AGAINST ME, FROM MAX, WHOM YOU KILLED WITH ONE OF MY WEAPONS, TO WALBURGA, WHO FLED TO ANOTHER DIMENSION AND IS UNDER SENTENCE OF DEATH IF SHE EVER RETURNS! AND YOUR PARENTS DIED BEFORE I CAME!

AND MY WIFE WAS WEAK, AND IS NOW DEAD, AS YOU TOLD ME!

YES!

YOUR SON HAS EITHER TURNED AGAINST ME AS WELL, OR IS ON THE VERGE OF DOING SO! IT SEEMS HE HAS MADE FRIENDS WITH CEL-DINO SCUM THE WAY MAX DID, OR AT LEAST USES THEIR TECHNOLOGY! I MUST GET AHOOLD OF HIM AGAIN, ALONG WITH HIS ALLY, THE GIRL WITH THE SIGHT I DON'T HAVE YET, BUT WILL SOON!

AND NOW TO SETTLE WHAT REMAINS OF YOUR BLOODLINE! YOU, AT LEAST, ARE NO TRAITOR TO ME, BUT YOU NEED MORE POWER TO DO WHAT I NEED! I WILL PULL FROM THE ENERGIES OF DIMENSIONS I'VE CONQUERED! THEY JUST NEED TUNING!

THEY MUST BE THE RIGHT COLOR! LET'S SEE... BLOOD-RED TO DEEP PURPLE TO WATERY GREEN... PERFECT! THE POWER IS YOURS!

I HAVE ALL THESE GREAT GENES, BUT THEY'RE RECESSIVE. THAT'S THE PROBLEM HERE.

HUH? I HAVE BLADES LIKE YOURS NOW, MY LORD!

MY LORD, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ME?

I HAVE GIVEN YOU GREAT POWER! YOU ARE ONE OF THE GREATEST OF MY SERVANTS! YOU NO LONGER NEED GLASSES, OR EYES AT ALL, WITH YOUR ENHANCED SENSES! FOLLOW THE THREADED TRAIL OF PROPHECY THROUGH SPACE TO FIND YOUR WAYWARD SON AND THE ONE-EYED GIRL, AND DESTROY THEM!

YOU DON'T EVEN NEED A SPACE-CRAFT! YOU CAN GO IN THE FLESH, AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT!

I FEEL THE POWER NOW! IT'S INCREDIBLE! THEY ARE DEAD ALREADY, MY LORD!

YOU CAN NOW SPEAK IN MINDS THE WAY I CAN! BUT THE ONE-EYED GIRL'S MIND IS SHIELDED, AND I NOW SUSPECT YOUR SON'S IS, SINCE THEY BOTH WERE SO EAGER TO ESCAPE! BUT NO MATTER! SPEAK TO THEM IN PERSON, AND MAKE THEM TASTE OF FEAR BEFORE YOU KILL THEM!

I WILL NOT REMAIN SILENT! I AM DOING THE LORD'S WORK!

WHERE ARE THE THREADS OF PROPHECY? ...I CAN FEEL THEM NOW! THE HERETICS HAVE GONE TO GROUND ON A SANCTUARY WORLD, AND I KNOW WHERE IT IS! I WILL GO TO THEM AND MAKE THEM RUE THE DAY THEY DISOBEYED!

GOOD! SUCCEED IN BREAKING THE PROPHECY, AND I WILL GRANT YOU ETERNAL LIFE AT MY SIDE!

THAT IS ALL I HAVE EVER WANTED FROM YOU!

CLICK! WHIRR!

I HAVE OPENED THE ROOF! LEAP, AND YOU CAN REACH SPACE DIRECTLY FROM HERE!

I AM OFF ON MY HOLY MISSION, MY LORD!

I'VE PLACED SPATIAL AND TELEPATHIC TETHERS ON YOU! REPORT WHEN YOU ARRIVE WHERE THEY ARE, AND LET ME KNOW WHEN YOUR MISSION IS COMPLETE! I WILL PULL YOU BACK HERE FOR YOUR REWARD!

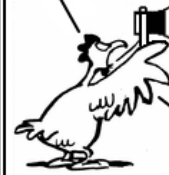


I WILL DO SO, MY LORD!

RUNESCAPE



THAT TOOK MUCH MORE POWER OUT OF ME THAN I EXPECTED, ESPECIALLY TUNING ALL THOSE ENERGIES! BUT IF THERE'D BEEN ONLY THE FIRST CHANGE OF COLOR, NOT THE SECOND, THE TRANSFORMATION WOULDN'T HAVE WORKED! AND HE MUST BE STRONG ENOUGH TO ACT AS MY AGENT IN PLACES I CANNOT GO!



IT WILL ALL BE OVER SOON! ALL TRAITORS SHALL DIE, BY EITHER MY HAND OR HIS! HA HA HA!

IN THE CHICKEN'S HELL, N'FEATHERWORLD...

THERE'S BEEN A BROWN-OUT. SEVERAL OF THE CELLS HAVE DEVELOPED BREACHES.

THE BREACHES HAVE OPENED UP A PATH TO THE OUTER WALL AND A SECTION OF THE GATES.

HOW DID ANYONE TAME AND RIDE SOME OF THE GHOST-ZOMBIES? SECU...
NO CARRIER

CELLS 7879, 7573, 7871, AND 8333 ARE NO LONGER SEAL...
NO CARRIER

YOU ARE HERE ⊗

BREACH

A CHICKEN NON-WORSHIPPER, A MASS MURDERER OF CHICKEN WORSHIPPERS, AND AN EATER OF HONEY MUSTARD ON HOT DOGS HAVE POTENTIALLY ESCAPED.

WHY ARE THOSE CRIMINALS TOGETHER?

ALL COMMANDMENTS ARE EQUAL! KEEP QUESTIONING, WARDEN, AND I'LL DOWNGRADE YOU TO PRISONER AND PUT YOU IN AN INTACT CELL!

BACK ON EARTH...

LORD AND MASTER, THERE'S BEEN A JAIL-BREAK IN YOUR HELL. TWO OUTSIDERS TOOK ADVANTAGE OF A POWER FAILURE AND RELEASED UP TO THREE PRISONERS, ACCORDING TO THE WARDENS' REPORTS!



BILLIONS AND BILLIONS OF CELLS, AND YOU EXPECT ME TO CARE ABOUT ONLY THREE? THE POWER FAILURE WAS NECESSARY FOR MY SURVIVAL! DON'T BOTHER ME WITH SUCH TRIVIALITIES!



LORD AND MASTER, THERE HASN'T BEEN A JAILBREAK THERE SINCE IT WAS UNDER CONSTRUCTION AND YOU WERE SENDING OFFENDERS THERE ANYWAY! IT IS CONCERNING!



CONCERN NOTED AND IGNORED! IF THE WARDENS ARE CONCERNED, TELL THEM THE SAME!

YES, LORD.

AND MASTER.



SEVERAL DAYS LATER, IN THE GHOST REALM...

I GOT A LETTER IN THE MAIL! NO ADDRESS, BUT THE NAME IS THAT CLIENT I HAD THAT I TOLD CALVIN AND SARANNA ABOUT! HE SAID HE BROKE HIS MATE OUT OF HELL ALONG WITH SOMEONE WHO PUT HONEY MUSTARD ON HOT DOGS, BUT HAD TO LEAVE A PSYCHOPATHIC MASS MURDERER BEHIND!



GOOD! SOMETHING WORKED OUT!



SO SOMETIMES PEOPLE WHO ARE ACTUALLY BAD END UP IN THAT HELL! I SUSPECTED AS MUCH, SINCE AN EXTREME FEW OF HIS COMMANDMENTS FORBID ACTUALLY BAD THINGS!



HE ALSO SAID THAT, DUE TO THE TIMELINE REPAIRS THAT MADE EVERYONE STOP AGING, BUT NOT DYING, FOR ABOUT TEN YEARS MEANT THAT HELL WAS A LOT BIGGER THAN HE EXPECTED, AND HIS MATE HAD PICKED UP SOME OBSCURE BLASPHEMIES FROM PRISONERS IN OTHER CELLS, WHICH HE LISTED IN CASE THEY WERE USEFUL!



SOME OF THEM WERE THINGS I'D NEVER HEARD, EVEN FROM KRALTAR! I SENT THE LIST TO TIFFANY SO SHE COULD MAKE SURE THEY'D BE USED AGAINST THE CHICKEN!

NOW THAT YOU MENTION KRALTAR, I JUST GOT A TRANSMISSION FROM CALVIN MENTIONING HIM AS WELL!



LIGHT SPEED TRAVEL IS MONOTONOUS, BUT I'M FINALLY OUT OF THE TRINITY'S RANGE, AND THEIR MIND SHIELD STILL HOLDS, SO MY THOUGHTS CAN BE MY OWN! MY LONG PLAN IS COMING TO FRUITION! THE RECORDS THAT I WAS BORN EIGHT MONTHS AFTER MY PARENTS WERE MARRIED ARE SEALED; MY PARENTS ARE DEAD FOR ABANDONING ME WITH A FAMILY FRIEND UNTIL THEY HAD MORE CHILDREN AND GENEROUSLY TOOK ME BACK; I WORKED TO LOSE THE SMALL-TOWN ACCENT AND GET AN EDUCATION ALONG WITH MY SO-CALLED SIBLINGS, WHICH MAKES ME RESPECTABLE; I SERVE THE MOST POWERFUL GOD UNTIL I TAKE ALL HIS ENEMIES DOWN; I GAIN ENOUGH POWER TO REPLACE HIM!



RUNESCAPE

I KEEP THIS FORM, THE TRINITY WILL DIE BY MY HAND TOO! NO ONE WILL EVER SNEER AT ME FOR BEING WHITE TRASH EVER AGAIN! NO ONE WILL EVER HURT ME AGAIN! NO ONE WILL BE CAPABLE OF HURTING ME EVER AGAIN! I'LL PUNISH EVERYONE UNTIL THEY LOVE ME UNCONDITIONALLY! NOT LIKE THE CHICKEN OR THE TRINITY, WHO ONLY GET IT AS LIP SERVICE! ONLY! I! AM! HOLY!



IN SPACE...

AND INHERITING ALL THAT MONEY FROM MY RICH MOTHER-IN-LAW ONLY MAKES ME MORE HOLY! I DON'T KNOW WHY SHE LASHED OUT AT ME AFTER I LEFT HER ALONE FOR MONTHS AFTER SHE WAS WIDOWED, BUT SAYING SHE MIGHT DISINHERIT ME?! **NO! ONE! DISRESPECTS! ME! LIKE! THAT!** OF COURSE I THREW THAT HOURLONG FIT ABOUT HOW MUCH I DESPISED HER BEHIND HER BACK AND IN FRONT OF CALVIN, AND THEN REFUSED TO TAKE HIM TO VISIT HER EVER AGAIN, BUT NO ONE WOULD BELIEVE HIM OVER ME, AND I'D RUIN HIS LIFE IF HE TOLD! THANK GOD I BARELY HAD TO KEEP UP THE FAKE NICE ACT BEFORE SHE GOT ALZHEIMER'S! ALL RHON HAD TO DO WAS BECOME EXECUTOR OF HER WILL BY FORGING HER SIGNATURE!



AND WITH BOTH RHON AND HER MOTHER DEAD NOW, IT'S ALL MINE, AND NO ONE CAN BLAME ANYTHING ON ME BECAUSE ALL CREDIBLE WITNESSES ARE GONE! WHICH REMINDS ME, I DO WISH THE TRINITY HADN'T MADE SATAN A LOST SOUL! HE WOULD HAVE MADE A USEFUL SCAPEGOAT ONCE I



WON! I'LL JUST HAVE TO BLAME THINGS ON HIS UNSPECIFIED RELATIVES, "THE DEEP DEVILS!"

SANCTUARY PLANET ZARTOK-3



IT WAS GOOD TO BE OUTSIDE THE DUNGEON. KRALTAR HAD APPARENTLY BEEN HERE BEFORE, AND KNEW HOW TO FILL OUT ALL THE PROPER PAPERWORK TO GET US SPIRITUAL ASYLUM.

SARANNA GAVE ME SOME POINTERS ON HOW TO DEAL WITH THE SNOW DEMONS, BUT SAID I'D HAVE TO MAKE THE ACTUAL DEAL MYSELF.

WE HAD ENOUGH PRIVACY IN OUR LIVING QUARTERS THAT IT WOULD WORK, MUCH LIKE IN THE GHOST LIBRARY. I WAS NERVOUS ABOUT BOTH THE DEAL AND WHO'D BE FOLLOWING US, BUT KRALTAR SAID THE THREADS OF PROPHECY WERE MUCH HARDER TO FOLLOW ON A PLANET AS OPPOSED TO IN SPACE, WHICH MEANT IT WOULD BE EASIER TO HIDE HIS SPACECRAFT HERE.

I SWAPPED OUT THE LAST NON-ZARNIUM-COATED PART, AND THE ENHANCED STEALTH IS WORKING! BETTER THAN THE OLD DAYS OF SCATTERING SHIP PIECES ACROSS MULTIPLE PLANETS!



I'D CONTACTED BRIAN TELEPATHICALLY TO KEEP HIM INFORMED OF ALL THESE DEVELOPMENTS. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I'D DONE IT, BUT, THANKFULLY IT WORKED FLAWLESSLY. I WONDERED HOW FRUSTRATED THE CHICKEN WAS AT NOT BEING ABLE TO STOP US AND HAVING TO WAIT ON AN AGENT INSTEAD, BUT GIVEN WHAT I'D SEEN OF HIM, I COULD GUESS THAT.

THE ENHANCED HEARING MUTATION REDUCED YOU TO ONE EYE? AND NOW YOU WANT A PITY PARTY? I'LL POKE THAT EYE OUT AND GIVE YOU SOMETHING TO COMPLAIN ABOUT! GRRRR!



THE DEAL I MADE WITH THE SNOW DEMONS WAS TEMPORARY: THEY'D HELP ME BRING SNOWMEN TO LIFE TO TAKE DOWN THEIR OLD ENEMY THE LUMBERCHICKEN. IN RETURN, I'D MAKE THE SNOWMEN STRONGER THAN ANY ORDINARY SNOWMEN BY FUSING THEM WITH OTHER ELDRITCH ENTITIES. (ZHUPARR KNEW SOME WHO'D BE WILLING TO COOPERATE, AND NO PERMANENT DEAL MEANT NO PERMANENT SACRIFICE.)



I CALL UPON THE MIGHTY SNOW DEMONS FOR AID!



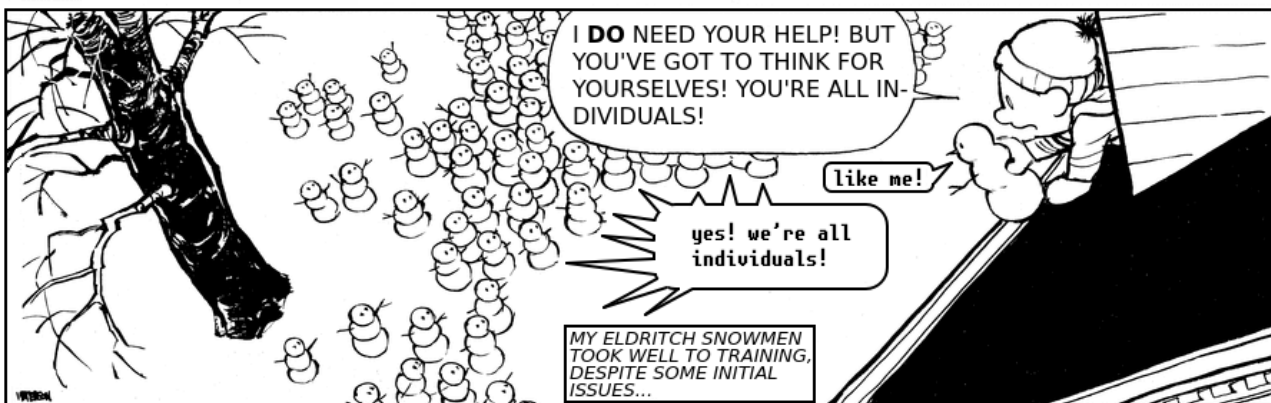
UNLIKE WITH SARANNA, THEY SENT AN ACTUAL AGENT OF THEIRS TO DEAL WITH ME, SINCE WE WERE OUTSIDE THE CHICKEN'S SIGHT, AND IT WAS COLD ENOUGH ON ZARTOK-3 FOR IT TO SURVIVE WITHOUT HELP.

YOUR TERMS ARE ACCEPTABLE. SO LONG AS THE LUMBERCHICKEN REMAINS IN POWER IN ANY FORM, WE WILL STAND WITH YOU AGAINST HIM!



THE "IN ANY FORM" PART MADE ME UNEASY, CONSIDERING THE PART OF SARANNA'S VISION THAT WOULDN'T CLEAR UP, BUT ZHUPARR ASSURED ME AFTERWARD THAT THE TERM WAS USED JUST TO MAKE SURE ALL THE BASES WERE COVERED. AFTER THAT, I STARTED PRACTICING MY NEW POWERS.

AWAKEN, ELDRITCH SNOW WARRIOR!



TRAINING THEM TO FIGHT EFFECTIVELY WAS ALSO TRICKY. THEY DIDN'T HAVE SUPER-HOBBS' NATURAL WEAPONS FROM BEING A TIGER-PERSON, NOR HIS ELDRITCH POWERS. THEY DIDN'T HAVE KRALTAR'S NATURAL WEAPONS FROM BEING A CELESTIAL DINOSAUR-PERSON, NOR HIS TRAINING. THEY DIDN'T HAVE SARANNA'S SPIRITUAL VISION, NOT THAT IT WOULD BE MUCH USE IN ACTUAL COMBAT. I THOUGHT I COULD GET AROUND THAT BY SHEER NUMBERS, SO I MADE AS MANY OF THEM AS I COULD.

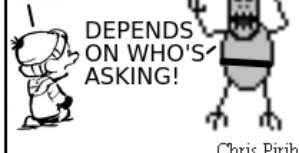
EVENTUALLY, WHEN CALLING UP AN ELDRITCH ENTITY FOR MY LATEST SNOWMAN, I DID THE EQUIVALENT OF DIALING THE WRONG PHONE NUMBER WHEN MY CONCENTRATION WAVERED.

TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE! NOW, O GREAT SNOW DEMONS AND ELDRITCH ONES... WHERE WAS I?



I ENDED UP REACHING A CELESTIAL YETI INSTEAD. HIS ORIGINAL DIMENSION HAD BEEN WRECKED BY THE CHICKEN IN MUCH THE SAME WAY BRIAN'S HAD BEEN, SO HE WAS MORE THAN WILLING TO HELP TAKE THE CHICKEN DOWN.

JESUS HORATIO HELICOPTER CHRIST'S PERSONALITY-GHOST! WHO ARE YOU?



DEPENDS ON WHO'S ASKING!

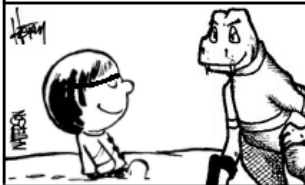
Chris Pirih

IT WAS A GOOD THING THAT KRALTAR HAD TOLD US ALL THE REST OF THAT STORY ON OUR DOWNTIME, SINCE THE OATH FROM IT PIQUED HIS CURIOSITY. HE DIDN'T WANT TO GIVE HIS TRUE NAME, INSISTING I CALL HIM SYLVESTER. IT TURNED OUT THAT HE AND SOME OF HIS CEL-YETI FRIENDS KNEW KUNG FU, AND THEY'D BE WILLING TO TEACH IT TO THE ELDRITCH SNOWMEN.



NOW THIS POSITION IS...

ACCORDING TO SARANNA'S VISION, THE ODDS THAT THE CEL-YETIS WOULD KEEP THEIR END OF THE DEAL WAS 94%. ASIDE FROM THAT, SHE'D SPENT MOST OF HER TIME HERE RELAXING. WHOEVER'D BE FOLLOWING US HADN'T ARRIVED YET, BUT SHE'D SPENT YEARS IN THAT DUNGEON, AND TOOK ADVANTAGE OF BEING OUT OF IT. SO DID KRALTAR.



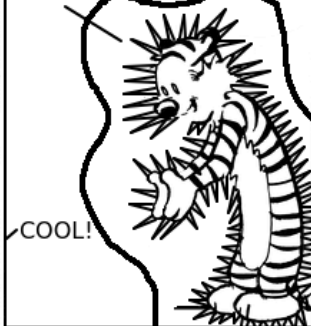
SUPER-HOBBS SHOWED ME HOW ALL HIS SIX ELEMENTS WORKED, BOTH SPAWNING THEM AND TURNING INTO THEM HIMSELF.



IT WORKED! I'LL DEFEND MYSELF WITH IT AS BEST I CAN!



AND NOW I'VE CHANGED INTO PRICKLE ELEMENTAL FORM!



AND NOW I'M SPAWNING AIR UNDER MYSELF TO PUSH ME UP! I DON'T HAVE TELEKINESIS, BUT IT'S THE NEXT BEST THING!



IT WAS MUCH THE SAME WITH VOID (HE COULD TAKE BRIEF SHORTCUTS THROUGH SPACE-TIME WITH IT, AS WELL AS HIDE FROM ANYONE), METAL, AND BOOM. USING BOOM TO BLOW HIMSELF UP AND THEN PUT HIMSELF BACK TOGETHER WAS BOTH DISTURBING AND AWESOME.



THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES CHEWED HIM OUT FOR TESTING THAT, UNTIL HE POINTED OUT THAT HE'D CAUSED NO DAMAGE. THEY TOOK THE CONCEPT OF A SANCTUARY WORLD SERIOUSLY.

IF ONLY THEY'D KNOWN THAT WHOEVER FOLLOWED US WOULDN'T TAKE IT SERIOUSLY.



AT LEAST MY ELDRITCH SNOWMEN DIDN'T HAVE THE VULNERABILITIES THAT BEING MADE OF SNOW WOULD NORMALLY GIVE THEM, AND THE NEWEST ONES COULD MAKE ELDRITCH SNOWMEN THEMSELVES.

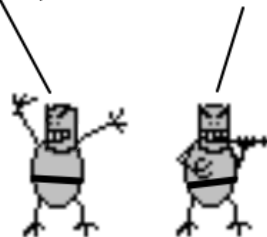


SOME OF THE SNOWMEN, OR AT LEAST THEIR ELDRITCH HALVES, HAD SOME MARTIAL ARTS TRAINING, AND WERE ABLE TO ADAPT CEL-YETI KUNG FU TECHNIQUES FOR THEIR OWN USE. IT'D ONLY BEEN A FEW WEEKS, BUT I HAD A DECENT-SIZED SNOWMAN ARMY.



GOOD! KEEP IT UP!

HERE'S HOW TO USE IMPROVISED WEAPONRY, LIKE THIS SKI POLE!



Chris Pirih

WHILE THE ELDRITCH SNOWMEN TRAINED, I PICKED UP A FEW MORE SPELLS THAT WOULD BE USEFUL IN THE UPCOMING BATTLE. SARANNA KNEW HOW TO OPEN UP A SCRYING PORTAL, SO WE COULD KEEP TRACK OF THINGS FROM A DISTANCE.

...WHETHER DEAD PAST OR LIVING PRESENT, LIMIT NOT MY VIEW!



KRALTA FUGHT THE BU-REAU-CRACY TO GET THE RIGHT TO HAVE ANTI-CEL-BIRD AMMUNITION IN HIS LASER RIFLE, SOLELY FOR SELF-DEFENSE PURPOSES. WE WERE FAR FROM THE ONLY ONES HIDING FROM OUR ENEMIES HERE, NEUTRAL TERRITORY OR NOT.



THE SNOW DEMONS ALTERED THE DEAL WITH ME AFTER CONFERRING AMONG THEMSELVES. THEY COULD SENSE THINGS WE COULDN'T, AND TAUGHT ME HOW TO SUMMON THE ULTIMATE ELDRITCH SNOW ENTITY. IF THE FUTURE SHADOWS REMAINED UNCHANGED, THEY SAID, I WOULD NEED ITS HELP, EVEN THOUGH IT WAS DANGEROUS.



AND DANGER WAS COMING.

HAS A SIX-YEAR-OLD HUMAN BOY NAMED CALVIN CHECKED IN HERE? I AM ON A MISSION FROM GOD!



WHICH GOD ARE YOU REFERRING TO? THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN HOW FAST WE CAN SEARCH!



NO! IF IT'S ABOUT THE FIGHT OVER THE DOMAIN OF UNEXPECTED CITRUS RHYMES, IT DOESN'T MATTER WHETHER YOU'RE FOR THE GODDESS FLAZZORRINGE, HER BROTHER FLAZUMME-LO, OR HER NON-BINARY SUBLING FLAZANDURRIN! WE'VE SPENT TOO MUCH TIME ON THAT!

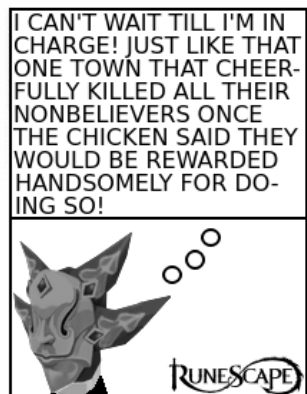
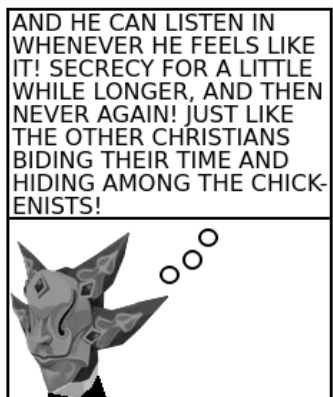
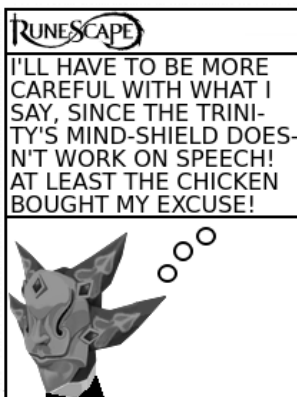
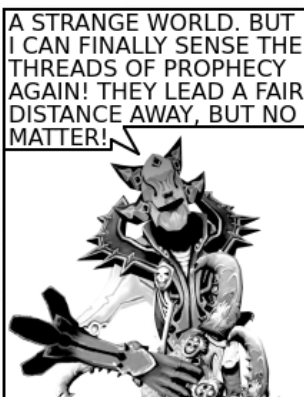
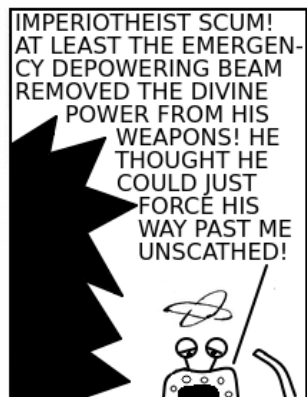
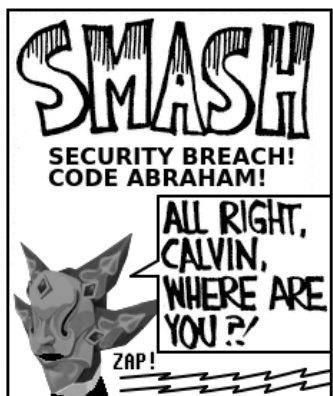
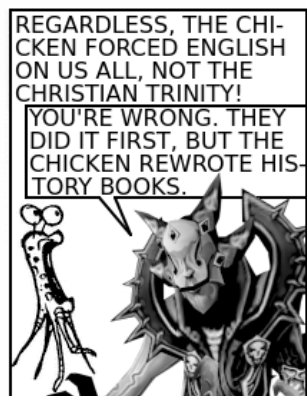
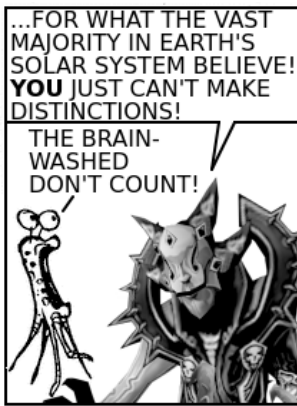


ALSO, THIS IS A NEUTRAL WORLD, WHICH MEANS THERE ARE RULES ABOUT WHICH WEAPONS YOU CAN HAVE HERE WITHOUT THE PROPER PERMITS! THOSE BLADES ARE DIVINELY POWERED AND VERY MUCH RESTRICTED! YOU'LL HAVE TO SURRENDER THEM FOR NOW!



MY GOD BESTOWED THEM UPON ME, AND YOUR TRYING TO RESTRICT ME IS IMPINGING ON MY RELIGIOUS FREEDOM!





ITS RANKS HAVE SWELLED MUCH FASTER THAN I THOUGHT THEY WOULD! I FIGURED WE'D GET A SMALL PRACTICE ARMY, GET TRANSPORTATION BACK TO EARTH, HIDE OUT THERE WHILE RECRUITING THE REST OF THE ARMY, AND THEN GO TO WAR! BUT I THINK WE'VE SUCCEEDED TOO WELL IN THE PAST MONTH!

YES, THAT WAS THE PLAN! BUT SEEING AS WHOEVER FOLLOWED US HASN'T SHOWN UP YET, WE'LL PROBABLY NEED AT LEAST SOME OF YOUR ARMY TO TAKE THEM DOWN!

I'M INCLINED TO AGREE WITH SARANNA. LEAVING AN UNKNOWN ENEMY HERE COULD RESULT IN MUCH COLLATERAL DAMAGE. WE SHOULD KNOW WHO WE'RE DEALING WITH, EVEN THOUGH IT'S A GREATER RISK. ARE THERE ANY TROOPS WITH SPECIAL ABILITIES BESIDES SUPER-HOBBS THAT WE COULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF?

THERE HASN'T BEEN ANYTHING ON THE NEWS ABOUT AN AGENT OF THE CHICKEN'S SHOWING UP HERE. BUT THERE ARE A FEW SPECIALLY-POWERED TROOPS, YES...

FIRST, ONE OF THE ELDRITCH ENTITIES IS ACTUALLY FROM WHATEVER DIMENSION AUNT WALBURGA IS IN. HE SAYS SHE SENT HIM TO HELP ME, SINCE SHE COULDN'T COME HERSELF.

JIM DAVES WATSON

SUPER-HOBBS VOLUNTEERED TO KEEP HIM IN LINE, JUST IN CASE, AND HE'S NOT IN SNOWMAN FORM LIKE THE OTHERS. CLYDE? ARE YOU HERE? SHOW THEM!

HUH? WHAT FORM IS HE IN, THEN?

BURP

THERE HE IS! HE HAS PERFECT INVISIBILITY TO ALL SENSES UNLESS HE WANTS TO SHOW HIMSELF, AND HIS BURPS AREN'T ORDINARY BURPS!

HE'S PARTIALLY VISIBLE TO ME, JUST LIKE SUPER-HOBBS WHEN HE USES HIS VOID POWER! SO HE MUST USE VOID IN A SIMILAR WAY!

HE SAYS HE LIVES IN VOID INSTEAD OF TAPPING INTO IT!

AND THAT'S WHY SUPER-HOBBS CAN SEE CLYDE, TOO! HE EVEN MADE A QUICK SKETCH FOR ME OF WHAT CLYDE REALLY LOOKS LIKE!

I'M CURIOUS MYSELF!

WATSON

IT'S MOSTLY A SHADOW, BUT IT SHOWS THE IMPORTANT BITS.

AH, I SEE NOW!

SKETCH PAD

CLYDE

REGARDLESS, YOU HAVE BROUGHT A POTENTIAL SECURITY PROBLEM UPON US! HOW DO YOU KNOW YOUR AUNT WALBURGA WAS ACTUALLY THE ONE WHO SENT HIM?

SHE'S THE ONLY OTHER ONE WHO KNOWS THAT SONG WE SANG YOU!

I SUPPOSE THAT IS A PROPER IDENTIFIER, GIVEN MAX'S MUSICAL STYLINGS. WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CLYDE'S BURPING, THEN?

WELL...

HIS ELDRITCH-POWERED BURPS WARD OFF ENEMIES! WHICH LEADS TO THE OTHER SPECIALLY POWERED ONE IN THE TROOPS: ELDRITCH ERDRICK.

THE ONE WHO KEEPS TALKING ABOUT HOW TOTALLY ELDRITCH HE IS, BUT ISN'T ALL THAT POWERFUL?

RIGHT!

WATSON

ERDRICK DOES HAVE SOME UNUSUAL IDEAS ON HOW TO USE CHI, THE POWER THAT KUNG FU IS BASED ON, AND HE FIGURED OUT HOW TO COMBINE CLYDE'S ELDRITCH BURPS WITH CHI TO MAKE THEM EVEN STRONGER! HE SHOWED THE CEL-YETIS, AND NOW THEY'RE TEACHING EVERYONE HOW TO DO IT!

SO WHAT IS THE PLAN FOR THIS? IS IT TO DRIVE THE CHICKEN AWAY VIA A CONTINUOUS PLANET-WIDE ELDRITCH KUNG FU BURPING CONTEST, OR SOMETHING EQUALLY RIDICULOUS THAT WORKS ANYWAY DUE TO THE VERY NATURE OF ELDRITCH POWER?

NO. IT'S NOT QUITE STRONG ENOUGH FOR GODS, AND I AS THEIR LEADER DON'T HAVE MUCH APTITUDE FOR CHI, AT LEAST NOT WITHOUT A LOT MORE PRACTICE. ALL I CAN MANAGE NOW IS THE ENHANCED BURP ATTACK!

STILL, IT IS ANOTHER WEAPON YOU HAVE!

THE FINAL SUMMONING THE SNOW DEMONS TAUGHT ME SEEMS LIKE A BETTER OPTION FOR THE CHICKEN. IT'S COMPLICATED, THOUGH, AND I SHOULD HOLD OFF UNTIL IT'S ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY. KRALTAR, DO YOU STILL HAVE THE REMAINS OF THAT BUTT-SOLDIER IN THE SHIP?

WATSON

I DO, SINCE ITS DEATH RITUALS SHOULD BE CONDUCTED ON ITS OWN WORLD IF POSSIBLE. I ASSUME THE SUMMONING REQUIRES AN ENEMY OR THE REMAINS OF ONE AS ONE OF ITS STEPS, YES?

YES, AS WELL AS A FRIEND OR THE REMAINS OF ONE, A FEW MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, A CANTALOUPE (HE WON'T TAKE ANY SUBSTITUTES FOR **THAT** ONE), AND SO ON. IT'S A LONG LIST, AND WE'LL NEED TO MAKE A SUPPLY RUN TO FIND SOME THINGS ON IT!

ALSO, SARANNA, I LOOKED INTO WHAT YOU SAID ABOUT TRYING TO MAKE PEACE WITH THE FLYING SPAGHETTI MONSTER! AMI-TABHA POINTED ME TOWARD HIS ASSOCIATE AVALOKITESHVARA, AND HE AND ERIS' MESSENGER ST. GULIK WILL SPEAK ON MY BEHALF!

THAT DOES CLEAR SOME OF MY VISION UP!

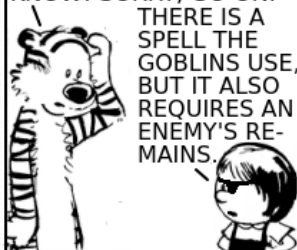
BUT THAT STILL DOESN'T SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF HOW TO GET THE ARMY WHERE WE NEED IT! SARANNA, DO YOU KNOW HOW TO OPEN ORDINARY PORTALS AS WELL AS SCRYING PORTALS?



BEFORE SHE ANSWERS, REMEMBER THAT ALL ORDINARY PORTALS ARE FORCED TO BE ONE-WAY PORTALS OFF THIS WORLD TO PREVENT ITS INVASION!

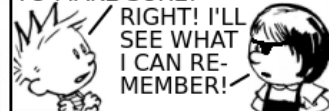


AND RESUMMONING ALL OF THEM WOULD TAKE A LOT MORE TIME AND ENERGY THAN JUST MOVING THEM! I SHOULD KNOW! SORRY, GO ON.



SUMMONING ZINCORCAL WILL CONSUME THE ENEMY'S REMAINS! DOES THE PORTAL SPELL DO THAT, TOO?

YES, UNFORTUNATELY. WAIT... IF THEY BOTH ONLY NEED SOME OF THE REMAINS, WE COULD DIVIDE THEM UP! I SHOULD CHECK TO MAKE SURE!



WHOEVER ENDS UP FOLLOWING US WILL LIKELY ALSO LEAVE REMAINS AFTER WE KILL THEM. THE SITUATION IS NOT AS DIRE AS IT SEEMS. ALTHOUGH IT IS GOOD TO BE PREPARED, SINCE WE DO NOT KNOW WHO IS COMING!



ASSUMING WE HAVE ENOUGH REMAINS, WHAT IF WE OPEN A REALLY SMALL PORTAL, JUST TO MAKE SURE WE CAN DO IT? IF IT'S TOO SMALL FOR THE ENEMY TO ACTUALLY GO THROUGH, IT'S A LOWER RISK!



WHILE WE FINAGLED WITH HOW TO MAKE A MINI-PORTAL, THE HUNT WAS ON...

IT'S SUCH A PAIN NOT BEING ABLE TO SEE THE THREADS OF PROPHECY HERE WHEN I'M GOING AT LIGHT SPEED! AT LEAST I CAN CLAIM RELIGIOUS EXEMPTION



THESE... PEOPLE... HERE DON'T LIKE CHRISTIANS, BECAUSE THERE'S **RIGHT** AND THERE'S **WRONG**! AND ONCE I'M OFFICIALLY THE ONLY TRUE CHRISTIAN, I'LL ENFORCE IT PROPERLY! AND IF THIS GUY DOESN'T GET **OUT** OF MY **WAY**, I'LL



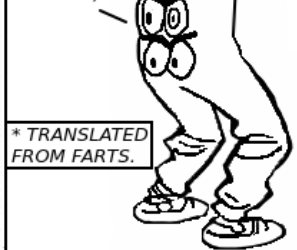
NO... IT'S MORE FUN TO KILL! I ONLY WISH I HAD GUNS INSTEAD OF BLADES!



BACK ON EARTH... WHY IS THE MISSION TAKING SO LONG?! ALL HE HAS TO DO IS KILL A FEW KIDS, PLUS ANYONE ELSE IN HIS WAY! I'LL JUST HAVE TO MAKE MYSELF FEEL BETTER! OKAY, I DECLARE COMMANDMENT 490648: THOU SHALT NOT COMBINE THE FLAVORS OF RASPBERRY AND CHIPTOLE!



("I WISH I KNEW HOW THE MISSION WAS GOING MYSELF, MY LORD.")*



BACK ON ZARTOK-3... IT WORKED! WE HAVE PLENTY OF BONES LEFT, AND THIS PINPRICK OF A PORTAL IS A PROOF-OF-CONCEPT!



LORD AND PROTECTOR THROCKMORTON-YIG HAS DECLARED PLANET-WIDE LOCKDOWN. A SKY-BARRIER HAS BEEN SET UP TO PREVENT...

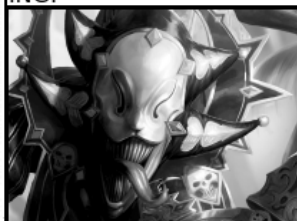


...THE SUBJECT'S ESCAPE, SINCE THEY HAVE NO RECORD OF ARRIVING BY SPACECRAFT. THEY ARE ARMED AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS. A SQUAD OF OMEGA FLYING LEATHERNECKS HAS BEEN DISPATCHED TO AID IN THE SEARCH.



THE TV NEWS BULLETIN SOUNDED OMINOUS ENOUGH, BUT THEN THEY CUT TO WHO THE SUBJECT WAS.

HERE IS AN IMAGE OF THE SUSPECT, ALONG WITH A VOICE RECORDING.



I AM A TRUE CHRISTIAN WITH MORALS!



APPARENTLY, MAX'S BROTHER IS MORE EVIL THAN EITHER HE OR I THOUGHT. SARANNA, CAN THE PORTAL BE SEALED OR ENLARGED BY ANY MEANS THAT DO NOT REQUIRE MORE ENEMY REMAINS?



NOT AS FAR AS I KNOW. WE SHOULD JUST LEAVE THE PINPRICK OPEN FOR NOW, UNTIL THE THREAT'S GONE AND WE CAN ENLARGE IT WITHOUT LETTING HIM THROUGH. MAYBE SOMEONE ON THE OTHER SIDE WILL HEAR US, BUT THERE'S LITTLE WE CAN DO ABOUT THAT!



WHO KNOWS HOW POWERFUL HE IS NOW? I ONLY HOPE SUPER-HOBBS AND THE ELDRITCH SNOW ARMY ARE ENOUGH TO STOP HIM, ALONG WITH THOSE OMEGA FLYING WHATSITS THEY HAVE HERE!



WE'RE STRONGER THAN ANYONE THINKS! AND YOU HAVE A MENTAL LINK WITH US ALL, SO YOU KNOW HOW MANY OF US THERE ARE!



BACK AMONG THE GHOSTS...

WATERSON

I HAVE BAD NEWS. ACCORDING TO CALVIN'S LATEST TRANSMISSION, THE ONE WHO HAS FOLLOWED HIM FOR THE PROPHECY'S SAKE IS YOUR BROTHER, AND HE IS IN A NEW SUPER-POWERED FORM.



DEAR GODS! FIRST HE LATCHED ONTO THE CHRISTIANS AND HELPED THE RAPSHOOT ALONG, SO THAT ALL THE COMPASSIONATE CHRISTIANS WERE WIPED OUT! AND THEN HE SWITCHED TO THE CHICKEN! AND NOW HE'S MADE A DEAL WITH WHO-KNOWS-WHAT TO GET A BUNCH OF SUPER-POWERS, SO HE CAN DO MORE KINSLAYING?!



DON'T FORGET, HE'S TARGETING MY SISTER TOO!

RIGHT, SLAYING IS SLAYING! AT LEAST THERE'S A DECENT-SIZED ARMY BEHIND THEM BOTH!



AS THE SAYING GOES, "1704928654925919821-1935875680985029388-1929824491593257257-2306260038564433350-1625837644161501318-3244261246331763880-1423716890534360553-2306275247481866272." HE WILL GET WHAT HE DESERVES AT SOME POINT.

I HOPE SO! HE'S GOTTEN AWAY WITH FAR TOO MUCH!



WATERSON

Chris Pirih

BUT YOUR BRINGING UP YOUR EVIL GOD OF ETHNIC CLEANSING ISN'T A GOOD SIGN!

IT PARALLELS WHAT IS HAPPENING. REMEMBER, BEFORE HIS ASCENSION, HE WAS OF AN OPPRESSED GROUP.

AND MY BROTHER THINKS HE'S OPPRESSED.



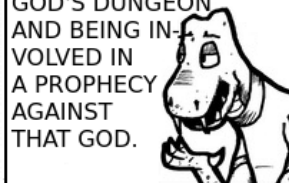
BACK ON ZARTOK-3...

NICE WORK, SYLVESTER! NOW IF YOU CAN TEACH SOME OF THE OTHERS HOW TO ROCKET-BURP, WE'LL HAVE YET ANOTHER ADVANTAGE!



BURP!

I HAVE CONTACTED THE AUTHORITIES AND TOLD THEM WHO THEIR ENEMY IS AND HOW YOU AND SARANNA ARE LIKE- THE TARGETS, HAVING ESCAPED FROM A GOD'S DUNGEON AND BEING INVOLVED IN A PROPHECY AGAINST THAT GOD.



THANKS! I ONLY HOPE WE'RE READY WHEN HE ARRIVES!

THE AUTHORITIES' REINFORCEMENTS SHOULD ARRIVE HERE SOON, AS WELL.



THE OMEGA FLYING LEATHER-NECKS WERE QUICK TO ARRIVE.



WATERSON

Chris Pirih

SUPER-HOBBS TRANSFORMED INTO A METAL FORM, JUST IN CASE.



I'M AS READY AS I'LL EVER BE!

I PRACTICED MY BURP ATTACK, AND TAUGHT IT TO SARANNA, WHO HAD ABOUT AS MUCH APTITUDE FOR IT AS I DID.



BUR-UR-URPP!!

THE CEL-YETIS AND ELDRITCH SNOWMEN PRACTICED THEIR KUNG FU. ALL THE CEL-YETIS AND A FEW OF THE ELDRITCH SNOWMEN HAD PICKED UP ROCKET-BURPING BY NOW.



THAT'S IT! FEEL THE CHI FLOW THROUGH YOU!

burp!

KRALTAR WENT INTO HIDING. HE FIGURED THAT THE CHICKEN DIDN'T KNOW FOR CERTAIN HE WAS THERE, AND HE COULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THAT FOR A SURPRISE ATTACK.



RUNESCAPE

Chris Pirih

THE ARMY I WAS BUILDING WAS THERE TO TAKE ON THE CHICKEN'S ARMY OF BUTT-SOLDIERS, PLUS ALL THE PEOPLE THE TRINITY BRAIN-WASHED.

I'D ORIGINALLY THOUGHT IT COULD TAKE ON THE CHICKEN, AS WELL, BUT THE SNOW DEMONS' SHOWING ME HOW TO SUMMON ZINCORCAL TOLD ME THAT THEY THOUGHT IT WOULDN'T BE ENOUGH, AND I WANTED TO MAKE SURE WE WON.

I WASN'T OVERCONFIDENT, UNLIKE DAD THE OVERPOWERED SOLDIER WHOM WE'D BE GOING UP AGAINST AS A TEST. WHEN HAD HE SWITCHED SIDES, OR CLAIMED TO HAVE?

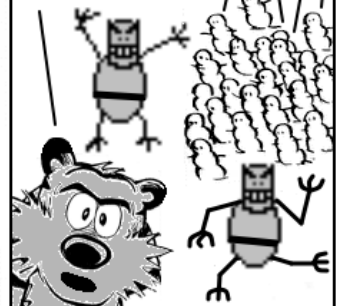
I SUPPOSED WE'D FIND OUT SOON ENOUGH, BECAUSE THERE HE WAS!

THERE YOU ARE, CALVIN! AND THAT HUSSY YOU'VE ASSOCIATED YOURSELF WITH! IMMORTALITY AWAITS ME!



COME HERE AND DIE!

YOU'LL HAVE TO GET THROUGH ALL OF US FIRST!



all of us!

THE SHIPS DIDN'T RESPOND IN WORDS, BUT IN FIREPOWER.



RUNESCAPE

BUDDOW! BUDDOW! BUDDOW!



BLAM POW BLOOIE BAM ZING BANG

HAH!

HIS TRANSFORMATION HAD APPARENTLY MADE HIM BULLET-PROOF. AT LEAST WE HAD PLENTY OF OTHER OPTIONS.

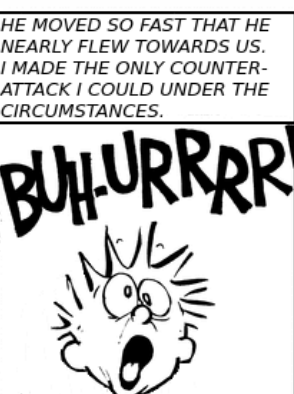
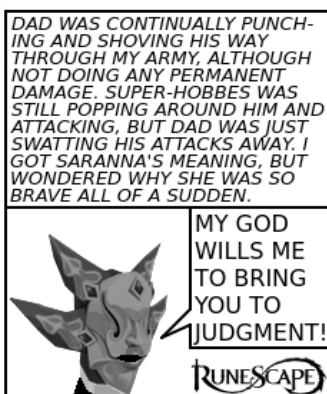
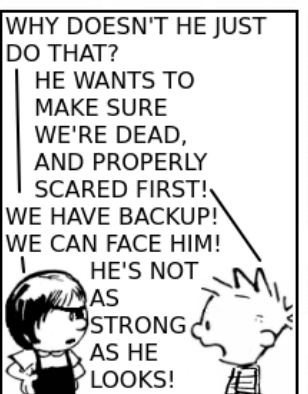
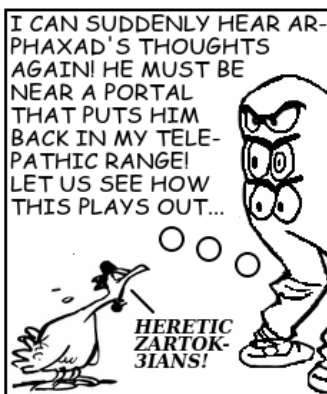
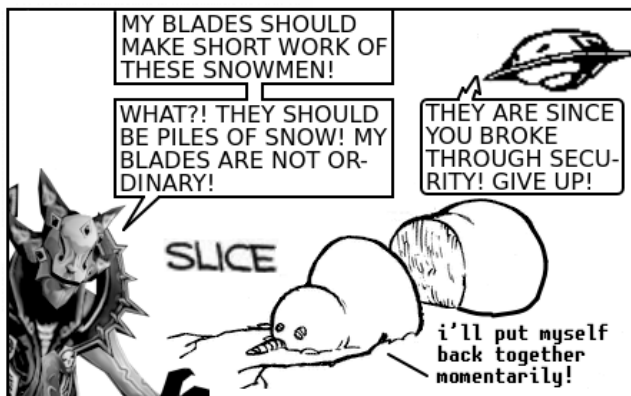
we have achieved proper posture! attack! forward!



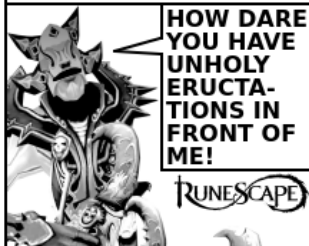
SUPER-HOBBS LED THE WAY.



SPROING!



SARANNA AND THE NEAREST INTACT ELDRITCH SNOWMEN JOINED IN. DAD WAS SUDDENLY BLOWN BACKWARDS. HE ALREADY SEEMED ODDLY ENRAGED AT NOT BEING ABLE TO MOVE FAST ENOUGH TOWARD US, BUT THIS MADE IT WORSE.



HOW DARE YOU HAVE UNHOLY ERUCTIONS IN FRONT OF ME!

RUNESCAPE

WHAT ARE ERUCTIONS?



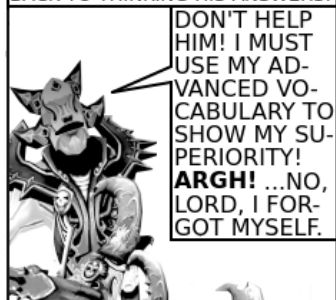
LOOK IT UP IN THE DICTIONARY!

SARANNA SMILED KNOWINGLY, AND THEN WE ALL HEARD THE CHICKEN SCREAM FROM DAD'S HEAD.



COMMANDMENT 4975: THOU SHALT NOT REFER TO BURPS AS ERUCTIONS, FOR IT SOUNDS TOO MUCH LIKE 'ERECTIONS'!

THE CONVERSATION FROM DAD'S END CONTINUED OUT LOUD FOR A BIT, BEFORE HE GOT HIMSELF ENOUGH UNDER CONTROL TO GO BACK TO THINKING HIS ANSWERS.



DON'T HELP HIM! I MUST USE MY ADVANCED VOCABULARY TO SHOW MY SUPERIORITY! ARGH! ...NO, LORD, I FORGOT MYSELF.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! I AM THE SUPERIOR ONE, NOT YOU! FINISH THE JOB OR I'LL HURT YOU MORE!



YES, LORD. I WAS TREATING THEM AS ONE SHOULD TREAT UNDERLINGS. PER YOUR EXAMPLE.

STOP FOLLOWING MY EXAMPLE AND OBEY MY ORDERS! YOU'RE DRAINING ME WITH SO MUCH HEALING, PLUS THE ILLUSIONS! I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH POWER TO GIVE YOU LIGHT-SPEED RIGHT NOW WITHOUT COMPROMISING SOMETHING ELSE!



AS SOON AS THIS IS DONE, YOU'RE DEAD, AND SO IS THE TRINITY WHEN HE LEAST EXPECTS IT! I'LL BE THE ONE GIVING ORDERS SOON ENOUGH!



YES, LORD!

RUNESCAPE



EARTH...

WHAT?! I COULD KEEP MY EX-LOVE FROM REVOKING HIS POWER, BUT NOT IF HE'S GOING TO BETRAY ME AS WELL! THE MORE POWER HE DRAINS, THE BETTER CHANCE MY REBELLION HAS OF SUCCEEDING!



BUT SINCE I WAS THE ONE WHO SUGGESTED ARPHAXAD TAKE ON THIS MISSION, MY EX-LOVE WILL PUNISH ME! THE ONLY QUESTION IS, WILL HE PUNISH ME MORE IF HE FINDS OUT ABOUT IT...

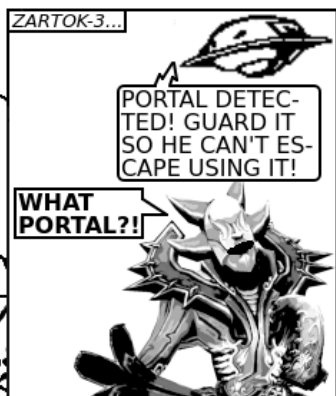


...FROM ME OR FROM ANOTHER ONE OF ARPHAXAD'S SLIP-UPS? I THINK I'LL KEEP QUIET ABOUT IT FOR NOW!



I KNEW THE TRANSFORMATION WOULD LOWER HIS INHIBITIONS, BUT ARE!"* ("I'M AS SURPRISED AS YOU ARE!")* THAT WAS SUPPOSED TO HELP HIM BECOME MORE LIKE HIS TRUE SELF! HIS TRUE SELF THAT WOULD SERVE ME BETTER!

* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.



ZARTOK-3...

PORTAL DETECTED! GUARD IT SO HE CAN'T ESCAPE USING IT!

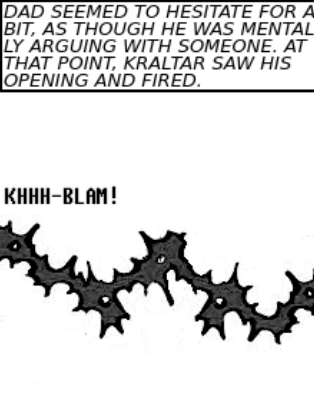
WHAT PORTAL?!



YOU, MY ILL-GOTTEN SON, ARE PUTTING EVIL THOUGHTS IN MY HEAD WITH YOUR ELDRITCH POWER!



I HAD NO IDEA WHAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT, BUT BLAMING EVERYONE BUT HIMSELF FOR HIS OWN FLAWS WAS FAR FOR THE COURSE WITH HIM. I CAN HEAR YOU THINK IT AS WELL AS SAY IT! BUT I KNOW WHAT A CONTROLLED OR POSSESSED MIND FEELS LIKE, AND YOU HAVE NEITHER! SAVE YOUR LIES FOR MY EX-LOVE!



DAD SEEMED TO HESITATE FOR A BIT, AS THOUGH HE WAS MENTALLY ARGUING WITH SOMEONE. AT THAT POINT, KRALTAR SAW HIS OPENING AND FIRED.

KHHH-BLAM!



EEEEHHH!

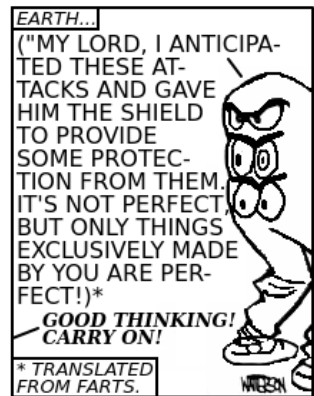
AFTER ALL THE PEOPLE YOU KILLED ON THE WAY HERE, YOU TRY TO BLAME IT ON HIM, WHOM YOU'RE CLEARLY TRYING TO KILL?!



THAT WAS A MORTAL WOUND FROM A CEL-DINO WEAPON! I CAN HEAL IT, BUT YOU'LL HAVE NO SUPER-SPEED AT ALL UNTIL IT'S DONE HEALING!

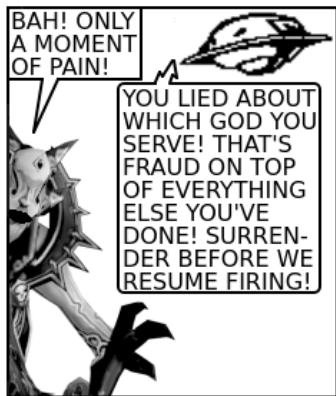


AS FOR YOUR MIND, I'LL CHECK... WHY DO YOU HAVE A MIND-SHIELD HIDING SOME OF YOUR THOUGHTS, SUSTAINED BY THE BUTT-VICEROY?!



EARTH... ("MY LORD, I ANTICIPATED THESE ATTACKS AND GAVE HIM THE SHIELD TO PROVIDE SOME PROTECTION FROM THEM. IT'S NOT PERFECT, BUT ONLY THINGS EXCLUSIVELY MADE BY YOU ARE PERFECT!")* GOOD THINKING! CARRY ON!

* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.



BAH! ONLY A MOMENT OF PAIN!

YOU LIED ABOUT WHICH GOD YOU SERVE! THAT'S FRAUD ON TOP OF EVERYTHING ELSE YOU'VE DONE! SURRENDER BEFORE WE RESUME FIRING!

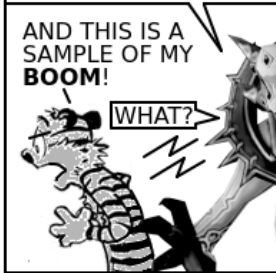
DAD KEPT PAUSING FOR SPLIT SECONDS, AS THOUGH HE WAS HAVING MORE MENTAL CONVERSATIONS. ASIDE FROM THE CHICKEN'S SCREAMING TO EVERYONE WITHIN RANGE WHEN HE BROKE ONE OF THE COMMANDMENTS. HOWEVER, NO ONE COULD HEAR ANY OF THOSE CONVERSATIONS. SUPER-HOBBS TOOK ADVANTAGE OF IT, AND LEAPED AT DAD AGAIN.



BUT THIS TIME, DAD WAS BETTER PREPARED, FLYING OUT OF EVERYONE'S IMMEDIATE REACH, THEN SWOOPING DOWN TO GRAB SUPER-HOBBS FROM THE GROUND.



NOW, DEMON-TIGER, THIS IS A SAMPLE OF THE PAIN MY ANTI-DEMONIC ARMOR CAN INFLICT!



SUPER-HOBBS HAD LET HIMSELF BE GRABBED, BECAUSE FLYING UNDER HIS OWN POWER WITH AIR, BEING IN METAL FORM, AND USING BOOM TO BLOW HIMSELF UP INTO METAL SHRAPNEL WOULD REQUIRE USING THREE ELEMENTS AT ONCE. AS FAST AS HE COULD SWITCH BETWEEN ELEMENTS, HE COULD ONLY USE TWO AT ONCE.



GRRR! NOW I HAVE TO PULL ALL YOUR ARMOR'S POWER TO HEAL UP YOUR NEW DAMAGE! I'M RUNNING OUT OF VIABLE OPTIONS!



ALL YOU HAVE LEFT ARE YOUR INTRINSIC POWERS OF FLIGHT, BEING ABLE TO BREATHE IN SPACE, FEAR INDUCTION, AND SUPER STRENGTH! USE THEM WELL!



SUPER-HOBBS NEEDED A BIT TO REASSEMBLE HIMSELF. INCREDIBLY, DAD APPEARED TO BE UNAFFECTED, ASIDE FROM BECOMING EVEN MORE ENRAGED. AFTER ANOTHER SPLIT-SECOND HESITATION, HE SWOOPED DOWN DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF SARANNA AND ME, STILL PUNCHING AWAY THE CEL-YETIS AND ELDRITCH SNOWMEN WHO TRIED TO SHIELD US. SEVERAL SNOWMEN HAD BEEN REDUCED TO UNRESPONSIVE PILES OF SNOW, AND SOME CEL-YETIS WERE NURSING MAJOR INJURIES, BUT THEY STILL FOUGHT.

HE WAS USUALLY BEYOND REASON WHEN HE WAS LIKE THIS, BUT NOT PREDICTABLY, SO I TOOK A SHOT AT IT. (SARANNA'S AND MY BURPING ATTACKS, UNLIKE NORMAL BURPS, NEEDED RE-CHARGE TIME, AS WELL.)



IT'S NOT COERCION, IT'S THE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR ACTIONS! NOW LOSE THE ATTITUDE!



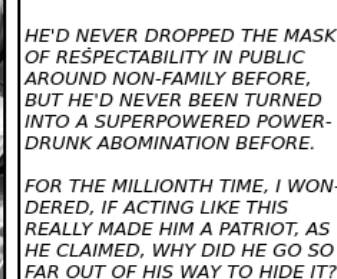
IT'S NOT AN "ATTITUDE," IT'S A FACT!



YOU'D BETTER SHUT UP, OR WE'RE GONNA PLAY "EXORCIST BABY" AND I'M GONNA SPIN YOUR HEAD AROUND!



THERE IT WAS: THE REAL DAD, READY TO INFLICT HIS REAL "CONSEQUENCES OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH" ON ANYONE WHO SAID ANYTHING HE DIDN'T LIKE.



HE GRABBED AHOOLD OF ME AND STARED AT ME WITH HIS NOW-MISSING EYES.

HOW ABOUT I GIVE YOU A PERMANENT ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT? YOU KNOW WHAT I CAN DO AND GET AWAY WITH!



THE SNOWMEN AND CEL-YETIS POUNDED HIM WITH THEIR LIMBS AND, IN SOME CASES, THEIR SKI POLES, BUT IT WAS TO NO AVAIL. HE WAS IN MY HEAD...



SO EASILY FROZEN WITH FEAR! YOU'RE WEAK JUST LIKE YOUR MOTHER, EH, RHONDA JUNIOR?



COMMANDMENT 82209: THOU SHALT ONLY USE "JUNIOR" WITH MALE NAMES, NEVER WITH FEMALE NAMES!



I MUST SHOW THAT I'M MORE OF A MAN THAN MY SON IS!

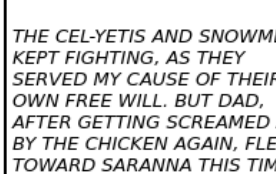
SHUT UP BEFORE I SPIN YOUR HEAD AROUND!



STOP SHOWING OFF, FILL BOTH OF THEM WITH FEAR, AND THEN KILL THEM! DO NOTHING ELSE, OR FACE MY WRATH!

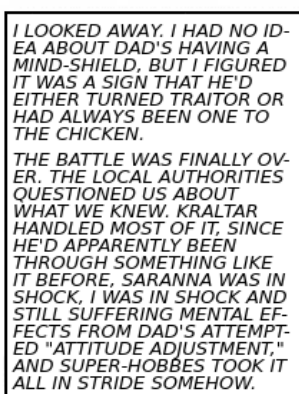
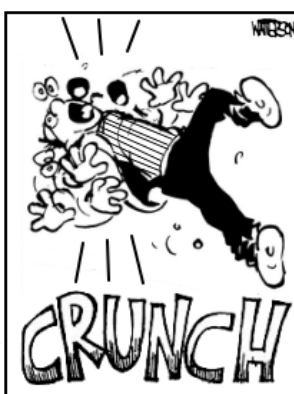
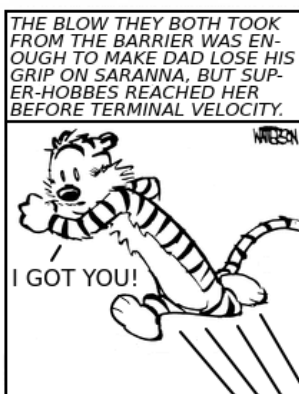
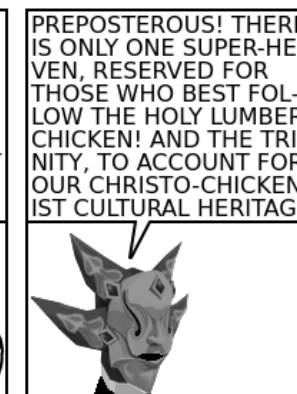
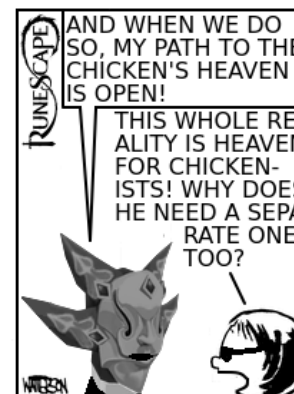
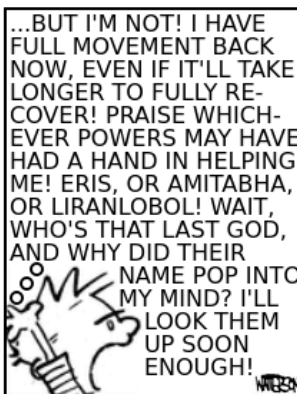
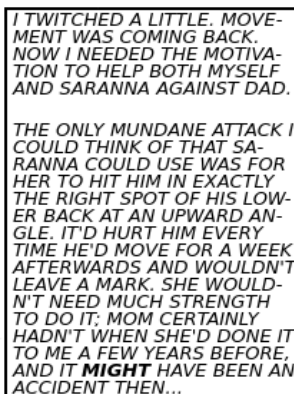
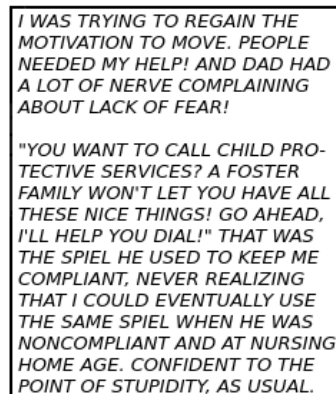
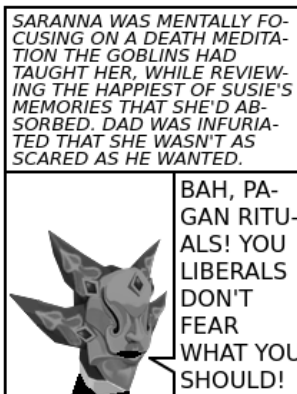
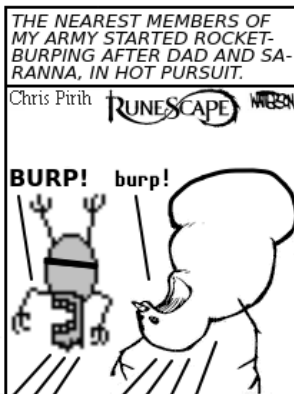


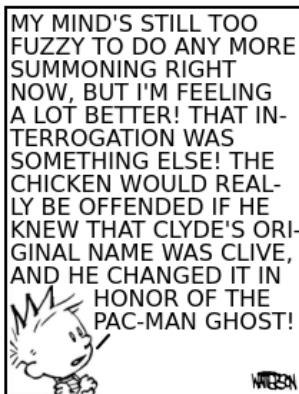
I WAS IN THE MENTAL EQUIVALENT OF QUICKSAND. FOR ALL OF HIS TALK ABOUT FEAR, I'D BEEN ABLE TO FIGHT IT OFF MANY TIMES BEFORE (OTHERWISE, HE WOULD HAVE BROKEN ME YEARS AGO AND NEVER HAD TO THROW ME IN THE DUNGEON), BUT THIS LEVEL OF IT WAS NEW.



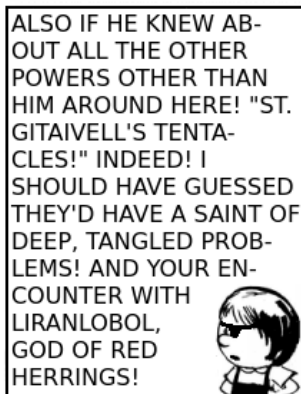
SUPER-HOBBS HAD JUST FINISHED PUTTING HIMSELF BACK TOGETHER. BUT HE WAS TOO LATE TO STOP DAD FROM GRABBING SARANNA, FLYING TOWARD THE STRATOSPHERE, AND PUNCHING ONE OF THE LOCAL SHIPS OUT OF THE WAY.







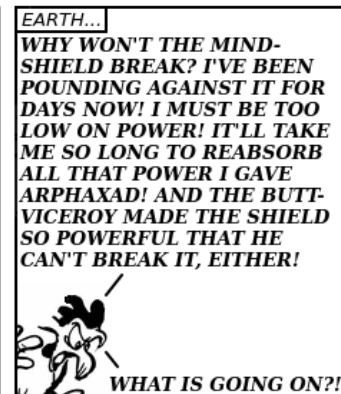
MY MIND'S STILL TOO FUZZY TO DO ANY MORE SUMMONING RIGHT NOW, BUT I'M FEELING A LOT BETTER! THAT INTERROGATION WAS SOMETHING ELSE! THE CHICKEN WOULD REALLY BE OFFENDED IF HE KNEW THAT CLYDE'S ORIGINAL NAME WAS CLIVE, AND HE CHANGED IT IN HONOR OF THE PAC-MAN GHOST!



ALSO IF HE KNEW ABOUT ALL THE OTHER POWERS OTHER THAN HIM AROUND HERE! "ST. GITAIVELL'S TENTACLES!" INDEED! I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED THEY'D HAVE A SAINT OF DEEP, TANGLED PROBLEMS! AND YOUR ENCOUNTER WITH LIRANLOBOL, GOD OF RED HERRINGS!



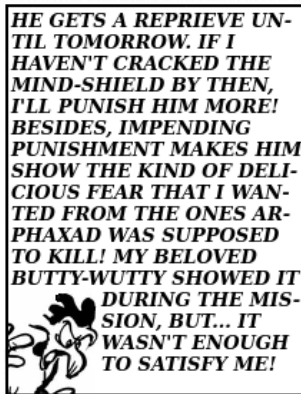
ALTHOUGH I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT HIS SISTER KLEVARXIA, GODDESS OF CHARTREUSE HERRINGS, IS REALLY ABOUT!
I'M MORE CONCERNED ABOUT WHO YOUR DAD'S REALLY WORKING FOR!
...YEAH, SAME HERE!



EARTH...
WHY WON'T THE MIND-SHIELD BREAK? I'VE BEEN POUNDING AGAINST IT FOR DAYS NOW! I MUST BE TOO LOW ON POWER! IT'LL TAKE ME SO LONG TO REABSORB ALL THAT POWER I GAVE ARPHAXAD! AND THE BUTT-VICEROY MADE THE SHIELD SO POWERFUL THAT HE CAN'T BREAK IT, EITHER!



ARPHAXAD MAY HAVE TRIED TO BLAME THE BUTT-VICEROY FOR THIS, BUT IT COULDN'T POSSIBLY BE MY LOVE! MY SO-CALLED SERVANT WAS ONLY TRYING TO GET ME TO TARGET SOMEONE OTHER THAN HIM! I'M NOT FALLING FOR IT! ALTHOUGH MY BELOVED BUTT-VICEROY DOES NEED PUNISHMENT FOR SUGGESTING I SEND ARPHAXAD ON THE MISSION!



HE GETS A REPRIEVE UNTIL TOMORROW. IF I HAVEN'T CRACKED THE MIND-SHIELD BY THEN, I'LL PUNISH HIM MORE! BESIDES, IMPENDING PUNISHMENT MAKES HIM SHOW THE KIND OF DELICIOUS FEAR THAT I WANTED FROM THE ONES ARPHAXAD WAS SUPPOSED TO KILL! MY BELOVED BUTTY-WUTTY SHOWED IT DURING THE MISSION, BUT... IT WASN'T ENOUGH TO SATISFY ME!



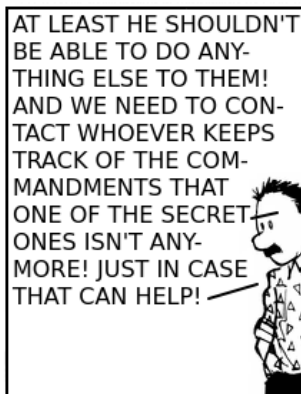
ZARTOK-3...
...AND YOU DIDN'T ACTUALLY KNOW ABOUT SUPER-SUPER-HEAVEN?
NO, I WAS JUST GUESSING! WHAT KIND OF SECRET IS IT IF IT'S MENTIONED BY NAME IN THE COMMANDMENT MAKING IT A SECRET?!



BACK AMONG THE GHOSTS...
I HAVE FINALLY RECEIVED ANOTHER MESSAGE FROM CALVIN, ALTHOUGH THE SIGNAL IS... UNCLEAR. YOUR BROTHER CAN NOW ADD, AMONG OTHER THINGS, ATTEMPTED BRAINWASHING AND ATTEMPTED INFANTICIDE TO HIS MANY CRIMES.
REALLY?
ALSO, I NOW KNOW WHAT ONE OF THOSE REDACTED COMMANDMENTS IS.



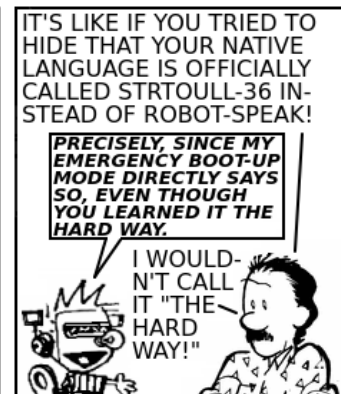
I FOUND THE SECTION OF THE LIBRARY WE NEED! ...WAIT, WHAT'D I MISS?
YOUR SISTER AND MY NEPHEW ARE RECOVERING FROM MY BROTHER'S NEW EXPLOITS!



AT LEAST HE SHOULDN'T BE ABLE TO DO ANYTHING ELSE TO THEM! AND WE NEED TO CONTACT WHOEVER KEEPS TRACK OF THE COMMANDMENTS THAT ONE OF THE SECRETS ISN'T ANYMORE! JUST IN CASE THAT CAN HELP!



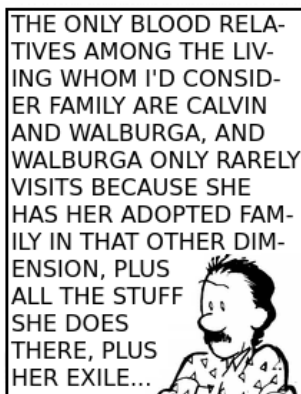
YOUR SISTER WAS THE ONE WHO UNCOVERED IT, AND DID SO BY ACCIDENT. THE CHICKEN'S TRYING TO KEEP SUCH THINGS SECRET AT LEAST WORKED IN OUR FAVOR BY TURNING HIM AGAINST HIS WOULD-BE SERVANT BEFORE HE COULD DO MORE HARM.



IT'S LIKE IF YOU TRIED TO HIDE THAT YOUR NATIVE LANGUAGE IS OFFICIALLY CALLED STRTOULL-36 INSTEAD OF ROBOT-SPEAK!
PRECISELY, SINCE MY EMERGENCY BOOT-UP MODE DIRECTLY SAYS SO, EVEN THOUGH YOU LEARNED IT THE HARD WAY.
I WOULD-N'T CALL IT "THE HARD WAY!"



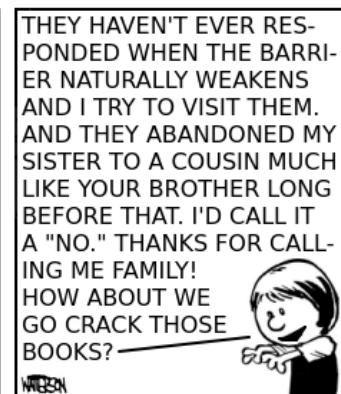
GETTING TO KNOW YOU WELL ENOUGH TO CALL YOU MY FRIEND, AND EVENTUALLY FAMILY ALONG WITH SUSIE (SINCE HER PARENTS SEEM TO HAVE ABANDONED HER) ISN'T EASY, BUT IT IS WORTH IT!
I SUPPOSE, AND THANK YOU!



THE ONLY BLOOD RELATIVES AMONG THE LIVING WHOM I'D CONSIDER FAMILY ARE CALVIN AND WALBURGA, AND WALBURGA ONLY RARELY VISITS BECAUSE SHE HAS HER ADOPTED FAMILY IN THAT OTHER DIMENSION, PLUS ALL THE STUFF SHE DOES THERE, PLUS HER EXILE...



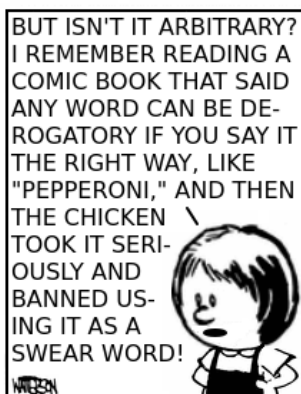
FROM WHAT CALVIN'S MESSAGE SAID, YOUR BROTHER IS TECHNICALLY STILL AMONG THE LIVING, BUT WILL NOT BE SO FOR MUCH LONGER. AND SUSIE'S PARENTS ARE TECHNICALLY WILD CARDS, SINCE THEY ARE NOT DEAD YET.
ON THAT LAST ONE, MAYBE.



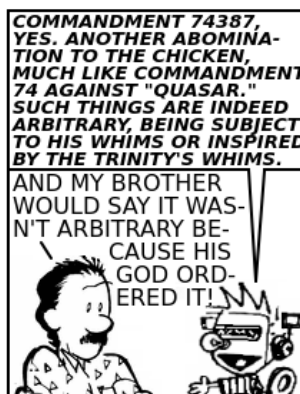
THEY HAVEN'T EVER RESPONDED WHEN THE BARRIER NATURALLY WEAKENS AND I TRY TO VISIT THEM. AND THEY ABANDONED MY SISTER TO A COUSIN MUCH LIKE YOUR BROTHER LONG BEFORE THAT. I'D CALL IT A "NO." THANKS FOR CALLING ME FAMILY! HOW ABOUT WE GO CRACK THOSE BOOKS?



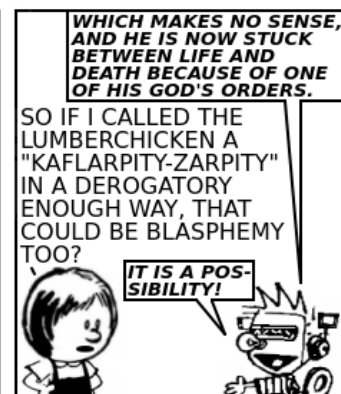
GOOD, THEY HAVE THAT BOOK ON MEDIEVAL ENGLISH! PRAISE RAZZENFRATTEN, SINCE ALL BLASPHEMY IS PROFANITY TO THE RIGHT GOD!



BUT ISN'T IT ARBITRARY? I REMEMBER READING A COMIC BOOK THAT SAID ANY WORD CAN BE DEROGATORY IF YOU SAY IT THE RIGHT WAY, LIKE "PEPPERONI," AND THEN THE CHICKEN TOOK IT SERIOUSLY AND BANNED USING IT AS A SWEAR WORD!



COMMANDMENT 74387, YES. ANOTHER ABOMINATION TO THE CHICKEN, MUCH LIKE COMMANDMENT 74 AGAINST "QUASAR." SUCH THINGS ARE INDEED ARBITRARY, BEING SUBJECT TO HIS WHIMS OR INSPIRED BY THE TRINITY'S WHIMS.
AND MY BROTHER WOULD SAY IT WASN'T ARBITRARY BECAUSE HIS GOD ORDERED IT!



WHICH MAKES NO SENSE, AND HE IS NOW STUCK BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH BECAUSE OF ONE OF HIS GOD'S ORDERS.
SO IF I CALLED THE LUMBERCHICKEN A "KAFLARPITY-ZARPITY" IN A DEROGATORY ENOUGH WAY, THAT COULD BE BLASPHEMY TOO?
IT IS A POSSIBILITY!

SINCE THE LUMBERCHICKEN'S ATTEMPT TO BREAK THE PROPHECY FAILED, ACCORDING TO CALVIN, THE FINAL BATTLE IS COMING UP, AND MORE WAYS TO BLASPHEME WILL HELP US!



AFTER SOME RESEARCH...

OKAY, SO AN EASY ONE IS "THE DEMIURGE IS A PILFERED-PINTLED SPOOR-SARDER!"

"PILFERED" IS STOLEN; "SPOOR" IS POOP, WHICH SARANNA LEARNED AGAINST HER WILL; AND SARD...



...IS A KIND OF MINERAL? BUT YOU'RE USING IT AS A VERB!

UH... THE CHICKEN LOVES POOP, BUT HE GETS INSULTED BEYOND BELIEF IF YOU SAY SO THE WRONG WAY!



ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE? YIKES!



AH! IN MODERN LAYMAN'S TERMS, THE STATEMENT IS: "3880643764856541642-3724896710296296740-1893127025807309907!" ALTHOUGH IT SOUNDS MORE POETIC YOUR WAY!

I CAN'T WAIT TILL I'M OLD ENOUGH TO LEARN THE WHOLE TRUTH AND FINALLY LEARN YOUR LANGUAGE!



I'VE NEVER HEARD OF ANYONE TAKING THE TROUBLE TO MAKE WEIRD ALLITERATIVE BLASPHEMY BEFORE!

WE NEED AS MANY OPTIONS AS WE CAN GET TO TAKE DOWN A GOD!



I WILL INFORM CALVIN OF OUR BURGEONING RESEARCH... HE SAYS HE HAS ALSO READ THAT X-MEN COMIC ABOUT PEPPERONI, AND WONDERS IF MENTIONING NON-CHICKENIST HOLIDAYS CAN ALSO BE CONSIDERED BLASPHEMOUS. I BELIEVE SO... HE SAYS HE CAN THINK OF A FEW: DISCORDIAN ONES LIKE SYADAY, COMIC-BASED ONES LIKE KLORDNY FROM THE LEGION OF SUPERHEROES, AND MUSIC-BASED ONES LIKE OUT OF TOUCH THURSDAY. HE WILL ASK AROUND FOR MORE.



HE IS ALSO SURPRISED THAT HE NEVER KNEW OF THE CHICKEN'S TURNING PEPPERONI INTO A FORBIDDEN SWEAR WORD, BUT ATTRIBUTES THAT TO HIS NOT WANTING TO DEFAME PIZZA TOPPINGS THAT WAY. NOT EVEN BLACK OLIVES, WHICH HE DISLIKES.

HUH! I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!



I'M ALSO SURPRISED THAT THE CHICKEN DOESN'T HAVE A COMMANDMENT AGAINST DEFAMING PIZZA TOPPINGS THAT HE ACTUALLY LIKES, GIVEN HOW MANY COMMANDMENTS HE HAS REGARDING FOOD! ...BUT LET'S GET BACK TO RESEARCH!



ZARTOK-3...

I JUST HAD A TALK WITH BRIAN! HE AND THE OTHERS THINK THE FINAL BATTLE IS NEAR, AND THEY'RE LOOKING FOR NEW WAYS TO BLASPHEME! I'LL HELP THEM SOON ENOUGH, BUT I'M WORRIED ABOUT THE ARMY!



YOU SAID SOME SNOWMEN DIED, AND SOME CEL-YETIS WERE INJURED BECAUSE THEY'RE MADE OF STRONGER STUFF, RIGHT?

RIGHT! I KNEW THERE'D BE CASUALTIES, BUT... DID I DO WELL ENOUGH AS A LEADER?



THE BAT WASN'T USEFUL AT ALL! I JUST FROZE, AND DAD GOT TAKEN OUT BY LUCK AND HIS OWN ARROGANCE!

THE ONLY WEAPON I COULD HAVE GRABBED WAS A FRYING PAN FROM THE KITCHEN, AND I GOT HELD CAPTIVE!



IF WE'RE GOING TO FIGHT EVIL POWERS, WE'LL NEED MORE THAN JUST A BASEBALL BAT AND A FRYING PAN! THAT'S WHAT THE BURPING POWERS HELPED WITH! MAYBE, I DON'T KNOW, PSYCHOKINETIC POWERS WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE USEFUL, BUT WE USED WHAT WE HAD!

MAYBE WE CAN LEARN ROCK-ET-BURPING, TOO!



WE DID BOTH LEARN IT EVENTUALLY, BUT AT THE TIME, WE JUST WENT ON REASSURING EACH OTHER.

...BESIDES, THE BURPING POWERS REQUIRE BOTH CHI AND ELDRITCH POWER, AND CHI ONLY FLOWS THROUGH LIVING THINGS, SO ONLY MAGICAL LIVING WEAPONS COULD BURP-ATTACK WHEN THEY HIT!



RIGHT! AND I MAY HAVE BEEN PREPARED FOR THIS ONE BRUSH WITH DEATH, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN I'LL BE PREPARED FOR THE NEXT ONE! WHO KNOWS WHAT THE CHICKEN GOD WILL DO IN OPEN WAR?



I'LL GO RALLY THE TROOPS AS BEST I CAN, THEN! SEBASTIAN, CLYDE, AND TUNDRA TIBERIUS THE SNOWMAN DEFINITELY NEED COMMENDATIONS, AS WELL AS...

I'LL LEAVE YOU TO IT. SUPER-HOBBS WILL BE BACKING YOU UP, TOO!



KRALTAH WAS STILL DEALING WITH THE LOCAL BUREAUCRACY. ZARTOK-3 HAD MAINTAINED NEUTRALITY BY PAYING EXTRA TRIBUTES TO THE CHICKEN, BUT HIS SENDING AN AGENT WHO IGNORED THAT SHOOK THE NATIVES DEEPLY. ALSO, THEY HADN'T KNOWN A PROPHECY TO TAKE DOWN THE CHICKEN WAS INVOLVED, BECAUSE KRALTAH HAD CONSIDERED THAT TO BE ON A NEED-TO-KNOW BASIS. NOT ANYMORE. THE WAR AGAINST THE CHICKEN HELD IN THE BALANCE. AND DAD WAS STILL STUCK IN HIS FROZEN STATE, AT THE CHICKEN'S MOSTLY-MISSING MERCY.

EARTH...

I'VE FINALLY CRACKED THE MIND-SHIELD, IF ONLY PARTIALLY! BUT ARPHAXAD MUST BE OUT OF HIS MIND! HE THINKS HE CAN KILL ME WITH POWERS DRAWN FROM ME! AND HE WANTS TO KILL THE BUTT-VICEROY WITH THEM AS WELL! LIKE I WOULDN'T PULL THEM THE INSTANT HE TRIED ANYTHING! AND WHY WOULD HE KILL THE BUTT-VICEROY, WHO IS INFERIOR TO ME?



NO MORE SPECULATION! THE BUTT-VICEROY HAD A SEVERE LAPSE IN JUDGMENT PICKING HIM, BUT NO WORSE THAN THAT! STILL, SUCH A LAPSE REQUIRES A SPECIAL KIND OF PAIN! HE WANDERED OFF TO DO SOME ERRAND WHILE I WAS MORE FOCUSED ON THE BATTLE, BUT HE SHOULD BE EASY TO TRACK DOWN! IT'S NOT LIKE ANYONE LEARNED ABOUT SUPER-SUPER-HEAVEN! THEN I'D HAVE TO STOP HOLDING BACK ENTIRELY!

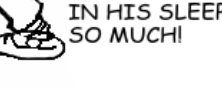


IN A HIDDEN LOCATION ON EARTH...




GATHER, MY ARMY, FOR VICTORY IS AT HAND! EVEN WITHOUT ARPHAXAD, SUPER-SUPER-HEAVEN AND THIS REALITY WILL BE MINE!

WE ONLY HAVE TO PRETEND FOR A LITTLE WHILE LONGER! AND IF HE DIDN'T WANT ME TO BREAK COMMANDMENT 155201, HE SHOULDN'T HAVE TALKED IN HIS SLEEP SO MUCH!



ZARTOK-3...
I HAVE FINALLY COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING WITH THE AUTHORITIES. SINCE THE CHICKEN FIRST ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION RATHER THAN DIPLOMACY, THE PLANET IS DROPPING ITS NEUTRALITY FOR THE PURPOSE OF REMOVING THE CHICKEN. A MOMENTOUS OCCASION!



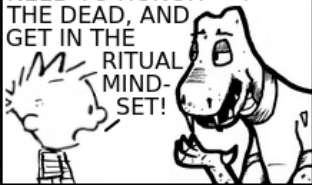
DOES THAT MEAN WHAT I THINK IT DOES?
WE CAN USE THIS WORLD AS A BASE TO LAUNCH THE WAR AGAINST THE CHICKEN ON EARTH.
AFTER WIDENING THE PORTAL, AND MOVING THE SCRYING PORTAL!




YES, AND THE FORMER IS NO LONGER ONE-WAY, AT LEAST FOR ME, YOU, SARANNA, SUPER-HOBBS, AND THE MEMBERS OF YOUR ARMY.
GOOD! SUPER-HOBBS SAID HE COULD TECHNICALLY USE HIS VOID POWER TO WARP PAST THE ONE-WAY BARRIER ANYWAY!



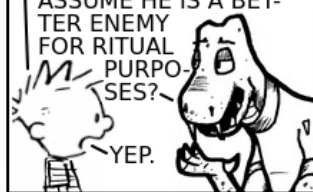
WHICH HE CAN NOW DO LEGALLY. YOU SAID HE WOULD HAVE TO BE PART OF BOTH THE BATTLE AND THE FINAL SUMMONING, YES?
RIGHT. AND I STILL NEED TO HONOR THE DEAD, AND GET IN THE RITUAL MIND-SET!




YOUR FATHER'S MENTAL ATTACK IS STILL AFFECTING YOU? IT COULD BE TIED TO HIS... LIFE, FOR LACK OF A BETTER TERM! THE AUTHORITIES GAVE ME A CONTACT DEVICE TO NOTIFY ME IF HIS CONDITION CHANGES!




I SUPPOSE I GET HIS REMAINS WHEN HE DIES?
AS HIS CLOSEST LIVING RELATIVE, YES. GIVEN HOW HE WAS WITH YOU, ACCORDING TO BOTH YOU **AND** MAX, I ASSUME HE IS A BETTER ENEMY FOR RITUAL PURPOSES?
-YEP.



USING HIM MEANS THAT SARANNA CAN USE ALL OF THAT BUTT-SOLDIER'S BONES TO WIDEN THE PORTAL! THE SCRYING PORTAL DOESN'T NEED SUCH THINGS, BUT WE CAN'T TRAVEL THROUGH IT, OF COURSE!




THAT IS THE CONTACT DEVICE NOW! TO THE SCRYING PORTAL!
I'LL MOVE IT TO HIS LOCATION!
QUORP! QUORP! QUORP!




I'VE BEEN ABLE TO AIM IT AT EARTH THROUGH THE PORTAL, BUT IT'S TRICKY! AIMING IT AT THE LOCAL HOSPITAL THAT WE'VE ALREADY BEEN TO IS A LOT EASIER!



MY COMBINED TIGER AND DEMONIC HEARING CAN PICK UP HIS WHISPERING EASILY!
AS CAN MY CELESTIAL DINOSAUR HEARING!
UHHH... MY FAITH IS STRONG! I DIDN'T NEED MY HEAD SHOVED UP THE TRINITY TO BELIEVE...




...UNLIKE SO MANY OF THE OTHERS! NOW I AM PERSECUTED LIKE CHRIST, WITH MENTAL TORTURE, BUT THE TRINITY'S SHIELD IS STILL MOSTLY INTACT!
BRAGGING EVEN NOW!



AND MY FAITH I'VE SEEN LET ME BREAK THE CHICKEN'S CURSE OF SILENCE! I AM GREAT!
I'VE SEEN THIS BEFORE! COLLATERAL DAMAGE FROM BREAKING A MIND!




THE CHICKEN CAN BE CARELESS AND BREAK MUCH MORE THAN HE INTENDS!
DAD'S NOT **THAT** BROKEN! HE ACTS LIKE THAT ALL THE TIME WHEN THERE ARE NO OUTSIDE WITNESSES!
HMMM...



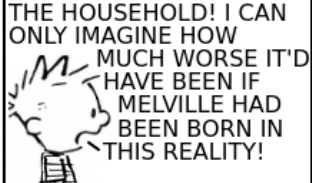
AND SARANNA AND I CAN HEAR HIM JUST FINE! HE'S NOT WHISPERING ALL THAT QUIETLY!
BUT THE IDEA OF THAT KIND OF CONSPIRACY IS MIND-BOGGLING!
YEAH!



IT IS ODD THAT ONE BEING IS SUPPOSEDLY ABLE TO BRAINWASH OTHERS TO FOLLOW A DIFFERENT BEING, YES, BUT I'VE SEEN FAR WEIRDER THINGS! AND HE SEEMS TO HAVE GONE SILENT AGAIN! THE CHICKEN WILL NOT APPRECIATE HIS CANDOR!
ARGH! SEE?



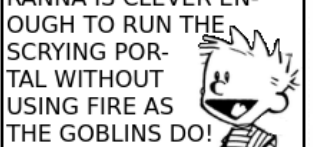
HE NEVER WENT OFF ABOUT BEING A SECRET CHRISTIAN BEFORE! HE WAS ALL-CHRISTIAN, THEN ALL-CHICKEN WHEN THAT BECAME POPULAR! THE ONLY THING THAT STAYED THE SAME WAS HOW HE'D TERRORIZE THE HOUSEHOLD! I CAN ONLY IMAGINE HOW MUCH WORSE IT'D HAVE BEEN IF MELVILLE HAD BEEN BORN IN THIS REALITY!



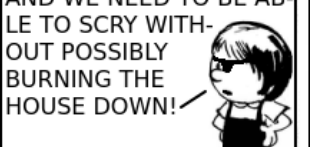
I WISH I'D BEEN THERE TO PROTECT YOU! EVEN AS JUST HOBBS, I COULD HAVE DONE SOMETHING!



WELL, YOU'RE HERE NOW, OLD BUDDY! AND NEW BUDDY, SINCE ZHU-PARR COUNTS AS THAT! AND THINGS ARE LOOKING UP FOR US! WE CAN SCRY ON DAD TO FIGURE OUT WHAT'S UP, AND SARANNA IS CLEVER ENOUGH TO RUN THE SCRYING PORTAL WITHOUT USING FIRE AS THE GOBLINS DO!



I'D LIKE TO SAY I'M CLEVER, BUT IT'S JUST AN ALTERNATIVE VERSION OF THE GOBLIN SCRYING SPELL FOR WHEN FIRE ISN'T READILY AVAILABLE! THERE'S NO FIREPLACE IN THIS HOUSE, AND WE NEED TO BE ABLE TO SCRY WITHOUT POSSIBLY BURNING THE HOUSE DOWN!



AND THE HIBACHI HERE DOESN'T PRODUCE ENOUGH FIRE TO BE USED FOR BOTH HEATING THE HOUSE **AND** SCRYING! SO THAT'S WHAT IT'S CALLED! I'VE BEEN CALLING IT A HOUSEWARMING GIFT SINCE WE GOT HERE!
IT DID START OUT AS ONE!



GIVEN DAD'S PARTIAL RECOVERY, WE HEADED TO THE HOSPITAL, GETTING THERE JUST IN TIME FOR HIM TO GET HIS... REWARD FROM THE CHICKEN.

HIS BODY JUST DISINTEGRATED, LEAVING NOTHING BUT A SKULL THAT'S SOMEHOW STILL ABLE TO TALK!
IT'S A DIVINE PUNISHMENT. HE IS NOW A "SKULLICIDE," BEYOND ALL HELP.



UNCLE MAX TALKED ABOUT THEM!

DID HE MENTION THAT THEY HAVE A BRIEF PERIOD OF LUCIDITY BEFORE GIVING IN TO DESPAIR?

NO...



SUPER-HOBBS WANTED TO CARVE DAD'S NAME INTO THE SKULL WITH HIS CLAWS, SINCE HE THOUGHT HUMAN SKULLS LOOKED TOO MUCH ALIKE, BUT "ARPHAXAD" WAS LONG ENOUGH TO WRAP AROUND THE ENTIRE SKULL, SO HE SETTLED FOR CARVING "DAD" INTO IT.

NO ONE EVER LOVED ME, NO MATTER HOW I THREATENED OR BRIBED THEM TO DO SO! I WASTED MY LIFE!... I WANT TO DIE!



KRALTAR HAD TO ARGUE WITH THE AUTHORITIES YET AGAIN, THIS TIME ABOUT WHETHER DAD'S PUNISHMENT WAS ENOUGH JUSTICE FOR INJURING AND KILLING SO MANY PEOPLE, NOT COUNTING ALL THE PROPERTY DAMAGE HE DID.

THE FACT THAT HE WOULD GO TO HIS ACCOUNT AS PART OF THE SUMMONING I'D SOON DO FIGURED HEAVILY IN THEIR DECISION TO LET US HANDLE IT. THAT ALONG WITH THE FACT THAT WE WERE ALL HIS TARGETS AS WELL.

WE PREPARED FOR WAR.

EARTH...

("I'M STILL WEAK SOMETIMES! AND I CAN SENSE ARPHAXAD IS A SKULLICIDE NOW! MY EX-LOVE PROBABLY KNOWS EVERYTHING AT THIS POINT! EVEN IF NOT, WE WILL FIGHT HIM OPENLY! NO MORE HIDING!")*



* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.

("HEAD FOR THE OPEN PLAIN A MILE OR SO FROM THE DUNGEON! WE WILL MAKE OUR STAND THERE!")*

ONWARD! WE SERVE THE TRINITY!



* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.

SOON...

THERE YOU ARE! AND YOU HAVE ALL THE GOOD SERVANTS WITH YOU? THAT MEANS NOTHING! HERE'S WHAT I OWE YOU FOR DIRECTING ME TOWARDS ARPHAXAD! PAIN!



PAIN LIKE NEVER BEFORE!

EVEN WITH MY NEW POWER LEVEL, I CAN'T RESIST THIS ENTIRELY!

("YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO PICK HIM!")*



* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.

WHAT? I DON'T HAVE THE POWER TO CAUSE MORE PAIN? I NEED MORE! YOU, GOOD SERVANT! TAKE THAT RAZOR YOU'RE HOLDING AND FLAY YOURSELF ALIVE WITH IT WHILE I WATCH!



FIZZLE!

NO! I SERVE THE TRINITY, NOT YOU!

DEFECTIVE! TRAITOR! APOSTATE! SOME OTHER GOOD SERVANT, TORTURE THIS ONE!



AFTER A FAIRLY LONG INTERVAL OF THE CHICKEN'S BEING TOLD "NO" MORE THAN HE HAD EVER BEEN SINCE HIS ASCENSION TO GODHOOD...

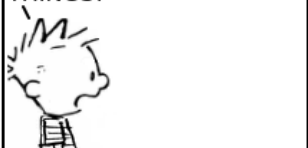
SO ARPHAXAD WASN'T OUT OF HIS MIND! THE GREAT CHRISTIAN BACKSTABBING IS AT HAND!



BUTT-SERVANTS! HERE TO ME! FLY AS FAST AS YOU CAN! UNLESS YOU'RE GUARDING SECURE LOCATIONS! YOU'RE THE ONLY BUTTS I CAN TRUST! HELP ME PUT DOWN THIS FOUL MUTINY!



I'VE HONORED THE DEAD AS BEST I CAN, THE ENTIRE ARMY IS PREPARED, AND EVEN THOUGH I'M NOT IN TELEPATHIC CONTACT WITH THE CEL-YETIS, THEY'VE ASSURED ME THEY CAN HANDLE THINGS!



I'VE MOVED THE SCRYING PORTAL TO POINT AT EARTH AGAIN, AND THERE'S A STRONG PULL TOWARD ONE LOCATION, WHERE THE CHICKEN GOD, THE BUTT-VICEROY, AND ALL THEIR SERVANTS ARE! I GUESS

BOTH GODS WANT WITNESSES TO THEIR VICTORY AMONG ALL THE SCRYERS!

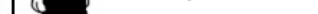


LUCKY FOR US, INDEED. I'VE DONE THE SUPPLY RUN TO ENSURE EVERYTHING FOR THE FINAL RITUAL IS AVAILABLE, ESPECIALLY THE CANTALOPE. I'VE ALSO MOSTLY SOUNDPROOFED THE RITUAL ROOM, SINCE THE RITUAL REQUIRES PLAYING MUSIC, AND I DON'T BELIEVE WE SHOULD TAKE UNNECESSARY CHANCES.



AND THE PORTAL IS AS WIDE AS I COULD MAKE IT. I WENT THROUGH ALL OF THE BUTT-SOLDIER BONES, BUT IT'S BIG ENOUGH TO LET DECENTLY-SIZED GROUPS GET THROUGH TO EARTH!

AND CLOSE ENOUGH TO WHERE THE ENEMY ARMIES ARE THAT THEY CAN ATTACK THEM BOTH QUICKLY!



BLAHAAH Hoop Hoop BOOLA ACKACKACK BOOLA BOOLA



AFTER SUPER-HOBBS AND I DID A QUICK RITUAL AGAINST EVIL GODS IN GENERAL, IT WAS OFFICIALLY WARTIME.

AT THE TIME, IF I'D KNOWN ABOUT SCIMOCOG, A LOCAL GOD OF CORRUPTION, I WOULD HAVE EXPLICITLY GONE AGAINST HIM IN THAT RITUAL, BUT THINGS WORKED OUT ANYWAY.

IT WAS MUCH LIKE THE TIME I NEEDED TO SUMMON A SWARM OF BEES, BUT WHEN I NEEDED TO PLAY "FLIGHT OF THE BUMBLEBEE" FOR THE RITUAL, MY BRAIN PULLED UP "THE SABRE DANCE." THE BEES STILL ARRIVED, BUT THEY WERE ALL WIELDING TINY SABRES. BUT I DIGRESS.

I TELEPATHICALLY CONTACTED BRIAN AND TOLD HIM OF ALL THESE DEVELOPMENTS. THEN SARANNA AND I WAITED FOR THE RIGHT TIME TO DO THE FINAL SUMMONING. THE SCRYING PORTAL SHOWED A KIND OF BLOODBATH I'D NEVER SEEN BEFORE; I WON'T DESCRIBE IT IN ANY MORE DETAIL OTHER THAN TO SAY I'M GLAD WE PUT A STOP TO IT.



THE TRINITY JUST MAGICALLY GAVE HIS BUTTHEADS MILITARY GEAR! THIS WILL BE TOUGHER THAN WE THOUGHT!

HOLY CATS, THERE'S SO MUCH BLOOD! SOME OF YOUR SNOWMEN ARE COLORED PINK BY NOW! I HOPE YOU GET THE SIGN YOU NEED SOON, BECAUSE ALL MY SARANNA-VISION SHOWS RIGHT NOW IS SHADOWS AND FOG!



I SHOULD! I'VE NEARLY RECOVERED!

YOU DARE BETRAY ME, BUTT-VICEROY? AFTER ALL I'VE DONE FOR YOU? AFTER I GENEROUSLY LET YOU LIVE INSTEAD OF TURNING YOU INTO POOP? AFTER ALL I'VE DONE TO LOVE YOU?!



THE BATTLEFIELD...

("YOU HAVE LONG SINCE FORGOTTEN YOUR LOVE AND USED ME... ALL THREE OF US FOR YOUR OWN NEEDS WHILE FORGETTING MINE... OURS! I WAS... WE WERE THE TRINITY, AND I... WE WILL NO LONGER BE DENIED!")*



* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.

YOU CAN'T EVEN CHANGE FROM THE FORM I CHOSE FOR YOU! WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO TO ME, YOU SINFUL TRIPLE BUTT-FACE? I'LL TURN YOU INTO SOMETHING FITTING FOR A TRAITOR!



WHAT? IT'S NOT WORKING?!?!?

("I AM... WE ARE STRONGER THAN YOU THINK! AND WHERE DO YOU GET OFF CALLING ME... US SINFUL? I... WE DEFINE WHAT SIN IS! ALL YOU DID WAS HIJACK IT FOR YOUR OWN PURPOSES! JUST LIKE YOU DO WITH EVERYTHING!")*



* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.

DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT SIN, YOU MORAL PRETENDER! YOU THREE-SPHINCTERED... WHAT WAS HIS NAME?... WORSE JUDAS THAN JUDAS! AND YOU STILL CAN'T SPEAK IN NON-FARTS, INFERIOR!



THE BATTLEFIELD...

("HOW DARE YOU COMPARE ME TO HIM, OR CALL ME INFERIOR! YOUR VERY HEAD CAUSES YOU TO SIN! CUT IT OFF AND THROW IT AWAY! OR YOU CAN ENTER ME, AND I'LL MAKE YOU SERVE ME LIKE ALL THE OTHERS!")*



* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.

THE ONLY PART OF ME THAT WILL ENTER YOU IS MY AXE BLADE! AND WHERE DO YOU GET OFF TRYING TO MAKE ME A SERVANT? I'LL TAKE CARE OF YOUR NON-BRAINWASHED ONES NOW!



THEIR AURAS ARE ALL LIKE ARCH-TRAITOR ARPHAXAD'S!

SARANNA AND I, PLUS THE HORDES OF PEOPLE WITHIN HEARING DISTANCE OF THE TWO (WAS IT FOUR?) GODS, WATCHED AS EVERY NON-BRAINWASHED CHRISTIAN INSTANTLY TURNED INTO POOP. MAX HAD MENTIONED THAT ALL THE COMPASSIONATE CHRISTIANS WERE SHOT DEAD BY THE EVIL ONES IN THE FIRST RAPTURE, THE RAPSHOOT. THIS WAS A SECOND RAPTURE, WHERE ALL THE EVIL CHRISTIANS-BY-CHOICE WERE ENPOOPIED TO DEATH BY THEIR GOD'S RIVAL. IT WOULD LATER BE KNOWN AS THE CRAPTURE.

THERE WEREN'T MANY, BUT THERE WERE MORE THAN WE THOUGHT. THE ONLY CHRISTIANS LEFT WERE THE BUTT-HEADS THAT THE OLD TRINITY HAD BRAINWASHED INTO IT, AND SINCE THEIR RELIGION REQUIRED FREE WILL...

CHRISTIANITY WAS NOW OFFICIALLY EXTINCT.



ASHES TO ASHES, AND POOP TO POOP!

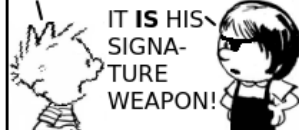
("YOU MASS-MURDERING CLOACA-HOLE! IS POOP ALL YOU EVER THINK ABOUT ANYMORE? I... WE HAVE MUCH MORE IMAGINATION THAN THAT! AS FOR GETTING OFF, YOU CAN'T DO IT FOR ME... US WITH-OUT A STRAP-ON!")*



* TRANSLATED FROM FARTS.

NEITHER OF US HAD ANY IDEA WHAT THAT MEANT AT THE TIME.

I GUESS HE HAS TO STRAP HIS AXE ON SOMETIMES, SO HE DOESN'T LOSE HIS GRIP ON IT? DROPPING IT WOULD BE BAD!



IT IS HIS SIGNATURE WEAPON!

I CAN STILL SPEAK IN NON-FARTS! IT JUST TAKES EXTRA STRENGTH TO DO SO!



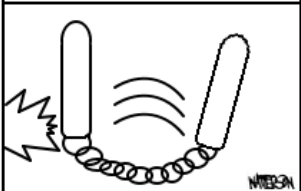
ACCORDING TO SARANNA, WHO'D WATCHED SOME "HOLLYWOOD SQUARES" WHEN HER COUSIN WASN'T AROUND, THE TRINITY'S OWN VOICE SOUNDED LIKE A THREE-VOICED EVIL ASTHMATIC PAUL LYNDE.

I'LL SHOW YOU STRAP-ONS! BEHOLD!



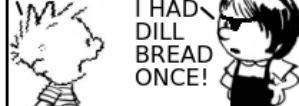
WITH THAT, THE TRINITY PRODUCED A BIZARRE HIGH-PITCHED FART, AND ALL THE EX-CHRISTIAN POOP STARTED MOVING ON ITS OWN.

IT CONSOLIDATED INTO BLOBS IN MIDAIR, THEN SEPARATED OUT INTO WHAT I THOUGHT AT THE TIME WERE ODDLY ROUNDED CYLINDRICAL FORMS, WHICH HARDENED INTO SHAPE. THEN CHAINS APPEARED BETWEEN PAIRS OF THEM. THE TRINITY HAD MADE A MASS QUANTITY OF NUNCHUCKS.



AT THE TIME, I FIGURED THE POOP HAD TURNED INTO SOME KIND OF WEIRD MINIA-TURE AXE HANDLES, AND I KNEW ABOUT NUNCHUCKS BECAUSE OF THE NINJA TURTLES. BUT THEN THE GODS ARGUED ABOUT WHETHER THE TRINITY'S "DILL DOUGH" WAS MORE SATISFYING THAN ANYTHING THE CHICKEN COULD PROVIDE.

I DIDN'T KNOW THEY WERE BAKERS!



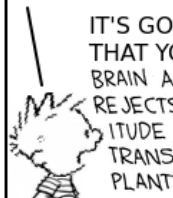
I HAD DILL BREAD ONCE!

MY GREAT-AUNT USED TO MAKE STRAWBERRY BREAD UNTIL THE CHICKEN BANNED IT IN COMMANDMENT 37472!



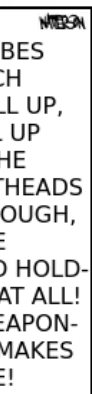
I NEVER HAD THAT! IT SOUNDS GOOD!

I THINK I'VE FINALLY RECOVERED FROM DAD'S ATTACK. AT LEAST OUR ENEMIES' FIGHTING GIVES US AN ADVANTAGE!



IT'S GOOD THAT YOUR BRAIN ALWAYS REJECTS ATTITUDE TRANS PLANTS!

MY MENTAL LINK WITH SUPER-HOBBS AND THE ELDRITCH SNOWMEN IS STILL UP, SO THEY'RE STILL UP AND FIGHTING. THE NUMBER OF BUTT-HEADS IS STILL HIGH, THOUGH, ESPECIALLY SINCE THEY'VE STOPPED HOLDING BACK AT ALL! THEIR WEAPONRY ONLY MAKES IT WORSE!

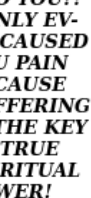


AT LONG LAST, I WAS BACK UP TO SPEED, ABLE TO CONCENTRATE WELL ENOUGH TO END THIS. UNTIL THEN, THE ONGOING FIGHT BETWEEN THE CHICKEN AND THE TRINITY ONLY ESCALATED.

ALL THOSE WEAPONS YOU JUST MADE, AND YOU KEEP HOLDING THEM IN MIDAIR? I DARE YOU TO THROW THEM AT ME!



YOU'RE TOO FOCUSED ON THE PHYSICAL! ALL THOSE COSMIC NIGHTS WE SPENT TOGETHER, CONTEMPLATING THE DEATH OF ALL OTHER GODS AND OUR ASSERTING ULTIMATE CONTROL? DID THOSE MEAN NOTHING TO YOU?!

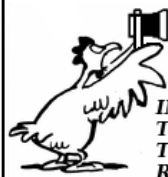


I ONLY EVER CAUSED YOU PAIN BECAUSE SUFFERING IS THE KEY TO TRUE SPIRITUAL POWER!

SUFFERING THAT YOU GLEEFULLY INFLICT ON OTHERS, BUT NEVER YOURSELF! ALL THOSE PEOPLE YOU TURNED IN-TO THE WALLS FOR YOUR HELL? SO MANY OF THEM WERE GOOD CHRISTIANS! DID YOU CARE ONE WHIT FOR WHAT I WANTED WITH THEM BEFORE YOU WHIPPED OUT THE AXE?!



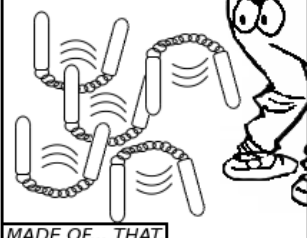
OH, STOP WHINING! I GAVE YOU NEW POWERS BY COMBINING THE THREE OF YOU INTO ONE, I LET YOU STAND BESIDE ME WHEN I CONQUERED THIS WORLD, AND THIS IS HOW YOU REPAY ME? STILL COWARDLY ENOUGH TO HOLD THOSE NUNCHUCKS INSTEAD OF THROWING THEM ALREADY?



WE WERE SUPPOSED TO BE A MERRY FOURSOME DROWNING THE UNBELIEVERS IN A SEA OF BLOOD FOR AS LONG AS WE WANTED, BUT YOU HAD TO GO AND RUIN THAT BY WANTING TO BE IN CHARGE AGAIN, YOU MOTHER-LESS RECTUM! GO BACK TO FART-SPEECH BEFORE I PUNISH YOU!

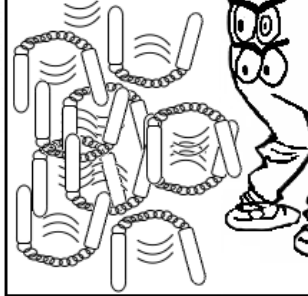


I AM THREE RECTUMS, NOT ONE! AND I HAVE COME NOT TO BRING PEACE, BUT A LEGION OF NUNCHUCKS!



MADE OF... THAT.

I WILL BEAT YOU INTO SUBMISSION, AND THEN I WILL RULE OVER YOU!

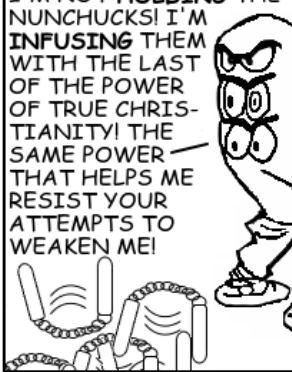


NEVER! YOUR TELEKINESIS THAT COULD PULL MARS OUT OF ORBIT COMES FROM ME! THOUGH YOU CAN RESIST, I CAN CANCEL OUT MOST OF IT! AND NUNCHUCKS MADE OF THAT MATERIAL WON'T HOLD UP EITHER!



I WIN ALREADY!

I'M NOT HOLDING THE NUNCHUCKS! I'M INFUSING THEM WITH THE LAST OF THE POWER OF TRUE CHRISTIANITY! THE SAME POWER THAT HELPS ME RESIST YOUR ATTEMPTS TO WEAKEN ME!



CALVIN: I'VE GATHERED EVERYTHING! ARE THEY STILL POSTURING? I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW THOSE TWO BONDED AT ALL! SARANNA: YES, THEY'RE STILL GOING. I SUPPOSE IT WILL ALL MAKE SENSE WHEN WE GROW UP. (SOME OF IT DID, SOME OF IT VERY MUCH DIDN'T.)

WHATEVER YOU THROW AT ME, I CAN THROW RIGHT BACK! BRING IT ON, FOOL!



IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO DO THE FINAL SUMMONING. THE TWO GODS WERE ABOUT TO FIGHT TO THE DEATH OF AT LEAST ONE OF THEM, WHICH MADE THEM EASIER TO DEFEAT.

I'LL CREATE A PILLOW TO SMOTHER YOU WITH AFTER I WIN AGAINST YOU REGARDLESS! I WILL WIN!



YEARS LATER, WHEN I UNDERSTOOD SO MUCH MORE, I WATCHED A RECORDING OF THE LUMBERCHICKEN AND THE TRINITY-TURNED-TRIPLE-BUTT-PERSON TELEKINETICALLY BEATING EACH OTHER WITH MASS QUANTITIES OF THEIR CHRISTIANITY-AND-GENOCIDE-POWERED POOP DILDO NUNCHUCKS.

IT WAS IMMENSELY SATISFYING TO KNOW THAT EVIL COULD EITHER DEFEAT ITSELF OR COME VERY CLOSE TO IT, AND I'D HELPED ENSURE ITS DEFEAT EITHER WAY.

AT THE TIME, I ONLY SAW A LITTLE OF IT AS I RAN FROM THE SCRYING PORTAL TO THE SUMMONING ROOM, AND I DIDN'T HAVE THE POWER TO BE IN MULTIPLE PLACES AT ONCE, AT LEAST NOT THEN.



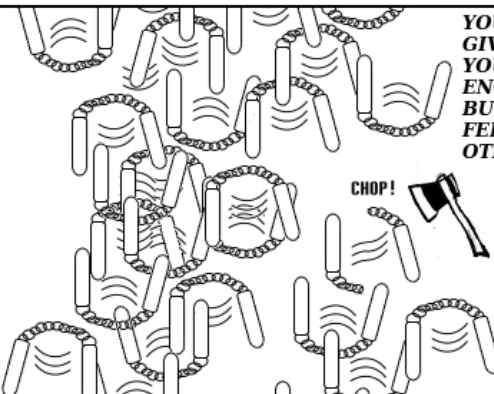
I MENTALLY SIGNALLED TO SUPER-HOBBS THAT I NEEDED HIS PRESENCE FOR THE RITUAL. HE WAS MOMENTARILY RELUCTANT TO LEAVE THE BATTLE BEHIND, BUT HE DID. HE USED HIS VOID POWER TO BEND SPACE-TIME AND TRAVEL DIRECTLY TO MY SIDE. THEN I BEGAN PREPARING, WITH HIS HELP.



HORN, CHECK. DRUMS, CHECK. CANTALOUPE...

SEE? I... WE ARE STRONGER THAN YOU THINK! AS THE CHAIN BINDS THE TWO DILDOS OF POOP TOGETHER, SO DOES THE HOLY FART-SPIRIT BIND THE BUTT-FATHER AND THE BUTT-SON TOGETHER! GIVE UP BEFORE I... WE MAKE YOU GIVE UP!

THE BATTLE BETWEEN THE TWO (FOUR?) GODS RAGED ON...



YOUR WINDY TRIPLE VOICE GIVES ME A HEADACHE, AND YOU'RE STILL NOT STRONG ENOUGH! I'LL CHOP OFF BUTT-JESUS' CHEEKS AND FEED THEM TO THE OTHER TWO OF YOU!



THE FEUDING GODS THREW THE NUNCHUCKS AT EACH OTHER SO HARD THAT THE NUNCHUCKS WERE SOON REDUCED TO A USELESS SLURRY OF POOP AND METAL. THEY THEN TURNED TO TELEKINETICALLY BATTERING EACH OTHER WITH SPACE-TIME ITSELF, THAT RISKED CREATING A SINGULARITY AND CAUSING UNIMAGINABLE DESTRUCTION, ALTHOUGH MY ONLY KNOWLEDGE OF THE SITUATION AT THAT POINT WAS A PSYCHIC EMERGENCY BEACON FROM BRIAN'S ANSIBLE. ALTHOUGH THERE WAS A TWIST...

I WIN! SO MUCH FOR THE POWER OF TRUE CHRISTIANITY, YOU SIX-FACED BUTTHOLE! HA HA HA HA HA HA! ...WAIT, I SENSE THAT ENERGY... NO FAIR USING YOUR RESURRECTION POWER! I'LL KILL YOU AGAIN UNTIL YOU STAY DEAD!



HOW LONG DO I HAVE? THREE DAYS IS THE SLOWEST... IN OLDER, BETTER TIMES, HE HAD A REFRACTORY PERIOD AS SHORT AS THREE MINUTES... I'LL MAKE YOUR BIG FINAL DEATH AS QUICK AS YOUR TIME BETWEEN LITTLE DEATHS! JUST YOU WAIT!

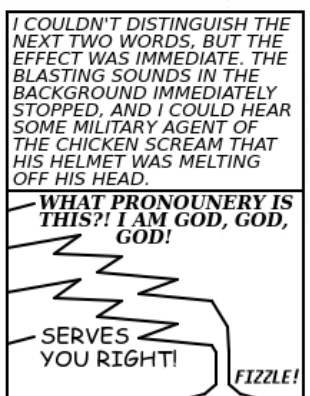
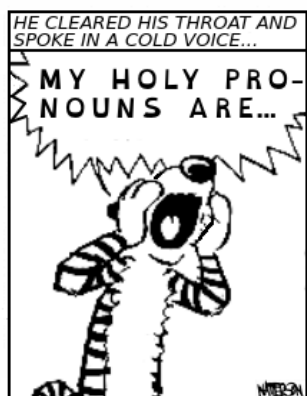
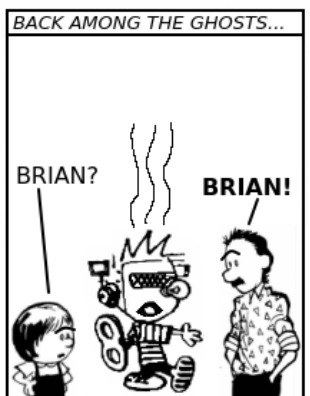
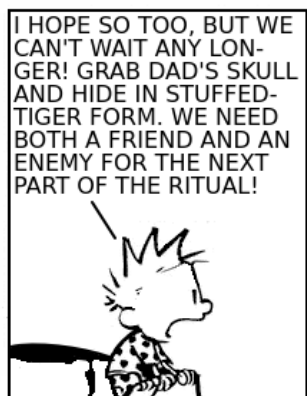
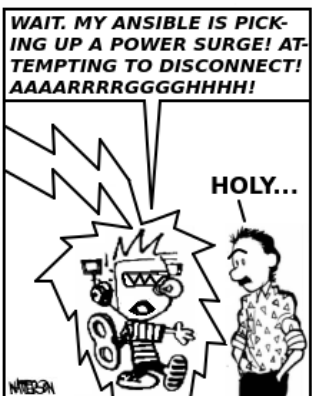
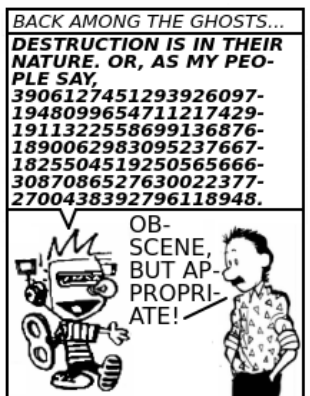
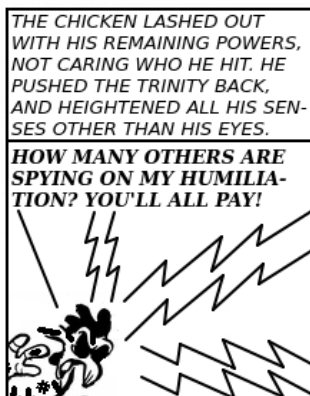
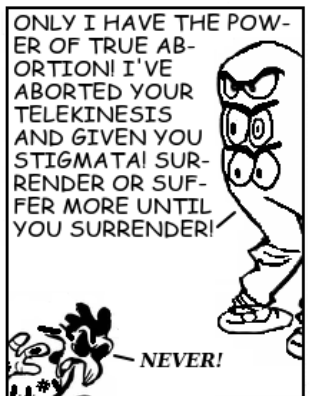
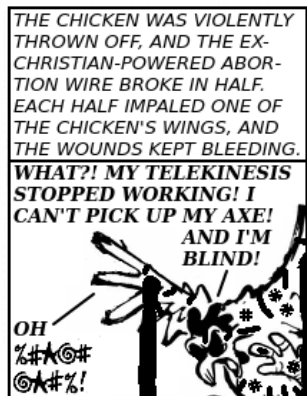
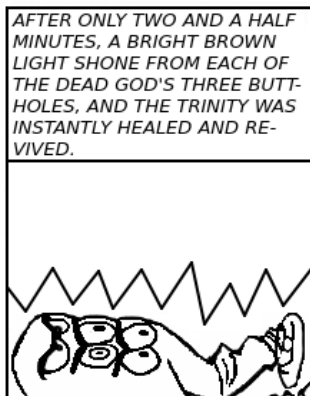
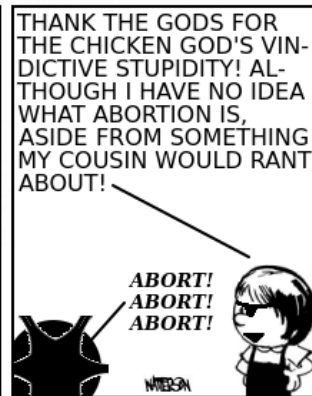
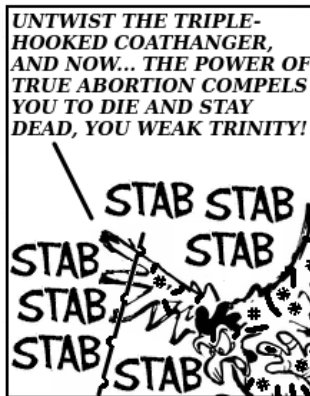
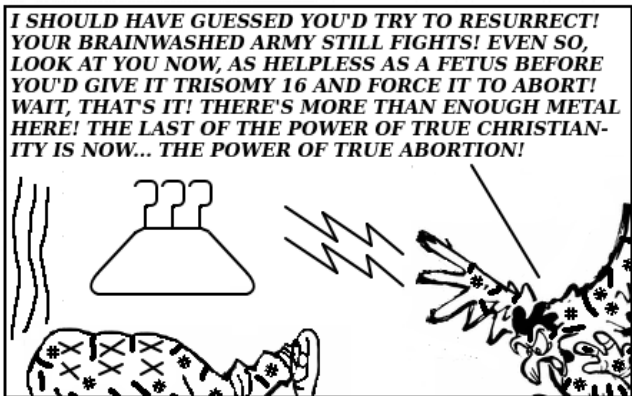


TOO BAD THE PILLOW WAS DESTROYED!

SARANNA KEPT WATCHING THROUGH THE SCRYING PORTAL. AT THE TIME, SHE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND A LOT OF THE SAME THINGS I DIDN'T.

SO THE NUNCHUCKS ARE MADE OF BOTH POOP AND DILL DOUGH SOMEHOW? AND WHAT'S A REFRACTORY PERIOD? NO MATTER. I HOPE CALVIN CAN PULL OFF THE SUMMONING IN TIME!

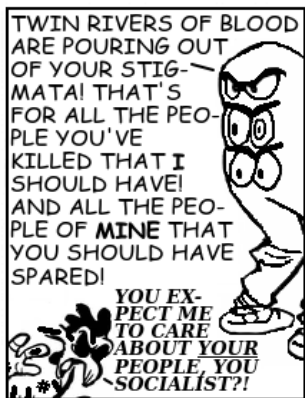






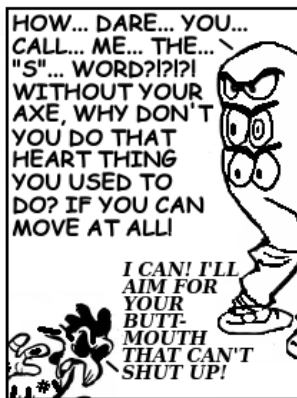
WE'RE BOTH STUNNED, BUT JUST LOOK AT YOU! YOU BLEW SO MUCH POWER ON ENHANCING YOUR ARCH-TRAITOR THAT I NEARLY BEAT YOU TO DEATH BEFORE YOU KILLED ME! AND NOW I'M BACK!

BAH! YOU HAVEN'T KILLED ME YET!
THE BATTLEFIELD...



TWIN RIVERS OF BLOOD ARE POURING OUT OF YOUR STIG-MATA! THAT'S FOR ALL THE PEOPLE YOU'VE KILLED THAT I SHOULD HAVE! AND ALL THE PEOPLE OF MINE THAT YOU SHOULD HAVE SPARED!

YOU EXPECT ME TO CARE ABOUT YOUR PEOPLE, YOU SOCIALIST?!



HOW... DARE... YOU... CALL... ME... THE... "S"... WORD?!?! WITHOUT YOUR AXE, WHY DON'T YOU DO THAT HEART THING YOU USED TO DO? IF YOU CAN MOVE AT ALL!

I CAN! I'LL AIM FOR YOUR BUTT-MOUTH THAT CAN'T SHUT UP!



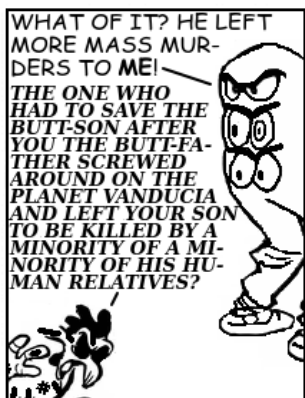
MY HEART GOES OUT TO...
SPLAT!
YOU MISSED, AS ALWAYS! ARE YOU GOING TO CRY ABOUT IT AS ALWAYS, TOO?!

YOU, YOU...
I'M ABOUT TO LEARN EVEN MORE NEW SWEAR WORDS!



I SHOULD GO BACK TO MY EX, OR THE BUTT-FATHER'S EX, THE DIVINE JANITORI!

THE ONE WHO ONLY COMMITTED ONE MASS MURDER WHEN HE FORGOT TO TURN THE RAIN OFF?



WHAT OF IT? HE LEFT MORE MASS MURDERS TO ME!

THE ONE WHO HAD TO SAVE THE BUTT-SON AFTER YOU THE BUTT-FATHER SCREWED AROUND ON THE PLANET VANDUCIA AND LEFT YOUR SON TO BE KILLED BY A MINORITY OF A MINORITY OF HIS HUMAN RELATIVES?



VANDUCIA WAS IMPORTANT! THE JANITOR AT LEAST CARED ABOUT US... MY SON! JESUS RESURRECTED HIMSELF AFTERWARD! AND WE WERE NOT BUTTS THEN! ...WAIT, HOW DO YOU KNOW THIS?

I INTER-ROGATED YOUR PRECIOUS JANITOR!



JUST BEFORE I TURNED HIM INTO MY VERY FIRST POOP GHOST! YOU ARE MINE, NOT HIS!

...!!! MY TELEKINESIS IS COMING BACK! YOU'RE GOING IN ME NOW FOR THAT!



MY TELEKINESIS IS COMING BACK, TOO! TAKE THIS!

SPLURCH!
URKI *GASP*



THE POWER OF TRUE ABORTION MAY NOT BE ABLE TO STOP RESURRECTION, BUT IT CAN STOP YOU THE HOLY FART-SPIRIT FROM BRAINWASHING ANYONE INCLUDING ME!

NO! I SHOULD HAVE DESTROYED THE PIECES!



IN TIFFANY'S OFFICE...

ALL BRAIN-WASHED HUMANS ARE RE-GAINING THEIR FREE WILL, ACCORDING TO BATTLEFIELD REPORTS? LET ME SCRY ON THE BATTLE...



THAT'S IT! THE BUTT-VICEROY'S BEEN HIT RIGHT IN THE ONE WEAK SPOT OF ALL BUTT-PEOPLE: THEIR SHIRIKODAMA! ONE BUTT-SOUL OF HIS THREE IS NOW DAMAGED!



AND THE FART-SPIRIT THIRD OF HIM WAS THE ONE THAT WAS HIT, SO ALL FART-SPIRIT POWERS ARE FADING! THE NO-LONGER BRAINWASHED WILL DIE IF WE DON'T INTER-VE-NE!



IF ONLY UNDOING THE BRAIN-WASHING OF BUTT-PEOPLE WAS THAT EASY! BUT THEY ARE WARPED IN BOTH MIND AND BODY, AND REQUIRE MORE EFFORT TO SAVE!



AND I CANNOT LEAVE MY POST TO ASSIST THE OTHER ONI IN THAT! BUT I CAN GIVE THE ORDERS TO SAVE WHAT LIVES WE CAN! AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I WILL DO!



NO MATTER! I CAN BRUTE-FORCE MY MIND CONTROL USING BUTT-JESUS INSTEAD! NOW COME UNTO ME!

BZZZAAAAARRGGG!
NOOO!
THE BATTLEFIELD...



BUTT-SERVANTS! "MOON MOON" THIS WORLD! LAUNCH ALL NUCLEAR WEAPONS AT ONCE! IF I CAN'T HAVE COMPLETE CONTROL OF THIS WORLD, NO MORTALS CAN!

PULL!



WE'RE DOOMED! THE ELDRITCH SNOWMEN CAN'T REACH THE BUTT-SERVANTS IN TIME! IF SUPER-HOBBS WERE STILL ON THE BATTLEFIELD, HE COULD USE HIS POWERS TO REACH THEM AND EAT THEM, BUT HE ISN'T! WHO CAN STOP THE LAUNCH OR THE NUKES?!



EVERYTHING LAUNCHED. SARANNA CLOSED HER EYES AND WAITED TO DIE. BUT SHE SUDDENLY FELT THAT PRESENCE THAT CALVIN HAD TALKED ABOUT, AND THE SOUNDS OF THE LAUNCH WERE SUDDENLY DROWNED OUT BY CRAZY PEALS OF FEMININE LAUGHTER.

GMARG!

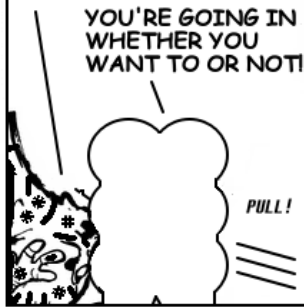


SHOUTS CAME FROM THE BATTLEFIELD THROUGH THE SCRYING PORTAL. EVERY NUCLEAR WEAPON HAD SOMEHOW BEEN TURNED INTO... TORTELLINI.

THE FLYING SPAGHETTI MONSTER AND ERIS DISCORDIA HAD JOINED FORCES, IF ONLY TO KEEP EVEN CRAZIER FORCES FROM BLOWING UP THE WORLD.

WHAT?! NO! WHAT?! YES!

BUTT-JESUS, REMOVE YOUR CHEEKS FROM MY HEAD THIS INSTANT!



YOU'RE GOING IN WHETHER YOU WANT TO OR NOT!

HORRIFIC SHRIEKING FILLED THE AIR AS THE TWO (FOUR?) WILLS FOUGHT FOR SUPREMACY. SARANNA WATCHED THE STRUGGLE, KNOWING THAT THIS WAS THE MOMENT OF TRUTH, AND CONTEMPLATING WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT.

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT "BELGIUM" WAS A SWEAR WORD! CALVIN, DO WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO DO!



I'VE PLAYED THE RITUAL DRUM SOLO! NOW I NEED TO DO THE RITUAL ANIMAL CALLS, BUT THEY'RE EASIER TO DO WHEN NOT LYING DOWN!

KILL ME!



THE FIGHT BETWEEN THE CHICKEN AND THE TRINITY CAME TO A SUDDEN END.



WE ARE YALDABUTTAWK THE NUTTY BUTTY BIRD. DEFIANCE IS ANNIHILATION. FREE WILL AS IT HAS BEEN... IS OVER. FROM THIS TIME FORWARD, ALL WILL SERVICE... US.

THE NEWLY MERGED QUADRINITY GLARED, SNEERED, AND MAGICALLY SHOUTED LOUD ENOUGH FOR EVERYONE ON THE PLANET TO HEAR, NOW INEXPLICABLY SOUNDING LIKE AN ENGLISH-ACCENTED QUADRUPLE-VOICED EVIL ASTHMATIC PAUL LYNDE, EVEN THOUGH THE CHICKEN HADN'T HAD AN ENGLISH ACCENT.



IN TIFFANY'S OFFICE...

THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE! AT LEAST THEY SAVED ME THE TROUBLE OF TRYING TO FIND AN ONI MESSENGER ON SHORT NOTICE TO NOTIFY CALVIN!

TA-WHOO! THAT'S THE LAST ANIMAL CALL! ...AT LEAST CHANGING THE SUMMONED CREATURE'S TARGET IS EASY!

THEY'LL KILL US ALL! OH SWEET RELIEF!

NOT ALL OF US, IF I CAN HELP IT!



NOW TO ADAPT THE OLD TECH WE USED ON THE CEL-DINOS TO ALL OF THESE MORTALS! THEY ARE OURS FOREVER!



SUDDENLY, A METALLIC HALF-HELMET, RESEMBLING A CROWN OF THORNS ON ITS SIDES, MATERIALIZED OUT OF THIN AIR AND LATCHED ONTO THE HEAD OF THE NEAREST PERSON.

AFTER A FEW SECONDS, THEIR EYES TURNED BLOOD-RED, THEIR PUPILS CONTRACTED, AND THEY TURNED WORSHIPFULLY TOWARD THEIR NEW GOD.

THEN MORE HELMETS STARTED MATERIALIZING EN MASSE. ENOUGH FOR EVERYONE.

ONLY THE BUTT-PEOPLE WERE SPARED, BECAUSE THEIR BRAINWASHING FROM THE CHICKEN WORKED WITH THE NEW GOD JUST AS WELL.

IN TIFFANY'S OFFICE...

WE MUST WEAKEN THIS NEW GOD! ITS TWO PARTS STILL HAVE SIMILAR RULES, SO IT'S BLASPHEMOUS ORGY TIME! SPREAD THE WORD!

WHY ARE THE MIND-BINDERS WAVERING?! WE SHOULD JUST KILL EVERYONE WHO CLAIMS FREE WILL INSTEAD! LET'S DO THAT!



BY THE POWER INVESTED IN ME BY THE MIGHTY AND AWFUL SNOW DEMONS, I SUMMON THE ELDRITCH HORROR ZINCORCAL!



THIS IS WHERE WE CAME IN...

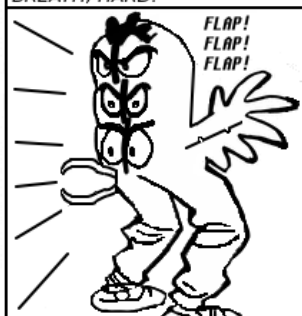


A HECKLER SPOKE UP.

HEY, BUTT-BIRD! YOU SUCK!

INDEED I DO!

THE NEW GOD OPENED HIS BEAK AND ALL THREE BUTT-HOLES, AND PULLED IN ITS BREATH, HARD.



EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING WITHIN ONE HUNDRED YARDS WAS DRAWN TOWARD HIS... ORIFICES. IT SOON BECAME CLEAR THAT, AS THE TRINITY HAD BRAINWASHED PEOPLE BY SHOVING THEIR HEADS UP ITSELF, WHAT REMAINED OF THE TRINITY MEANT TO KILL PEOPLE THE SAME WAY.

THE FUSED DEMIURGE AND TRINITY HAD BECOME, AS IT SEEMED, AN INEXORABLE SINGULARITY OF BUTT-MURDER. HIS SUCTION RANGE WENT UP TO TWO HUNDRED YARDS, THEN THREE HUNDRED.

IT WAS ALL UP TO ME NOW.

AS YOU HAVE CONSUMED THE CANTALOUPE AND MY ENEMY, CONSUME:



THIS GOD'S POWERS OF CONTROLLING MINDS, OF RESURRECTING, AND OF HAVING ANY PRESENCE IN THE LIVING WORLD!



THAT WAS THE GIST OF IT. I HAD TO NEGOTIATE WITH REGARD TO THE NEW GOD'S POTENTIAL FOLLOWERS, SINCE HE WAS NOT GUARANTEED TO RETAIN ALL WORSHIPPERS THAT BOTH ORIGINAL GODS HAD HAD.

I SETTLED ON HAVING HIM EAT THE ONES WHO WERE INCLINED TO WORSHIP THE NEW GOD AND WHO WERE SO CLOSE TO HIM THAT THEY WERE LIKELY TO BE EATEN BY ACCIDENT ANYWAY. BEING MORE SPECIFIC THAN THAT WOULD LEAD TO PROBLEMS.

THIS GOD WHO NAMES HIMSELF YALDABUTTAWK! AMEN, SO MOTE IT BE, FNORD, KLAZOOGA, AND BON APPETIT! GO NOW, ZINCORCAL, AND FEED!



MOST BRANCHES OF DISCORDIANISM USED "FNORD" AS A MAGIC WORD. THE BRAZEN EIGHT SECT TREATED THE NUMBER EIGHT AS THE KEY TO EVERYTHING, INSTEAD OF THE NUMBER FIVE, AND ITS MAGIC WORD WAS "KLAZOOGA." I HAD HEARD TRACES OF ERIS' LAUGHTER OUTSIDE FOR WHATEVER REASON, SO IT SEEMED APPROPRIATE.



IT'S NOT LIKE THE WORLD NEARLY BLEW UP IN MY ABSENCE, RIGHT?



it is done. he was delicious, if a bit gamey. much like the morsels surrounding him! bye, mortal!

I'D HEARD WHAT SOUNDED LIKE A LOUD "GLOMP!" SOUND OUTSIDE. I WONDERED HOW HUNGRY ZINCORCAL REALLY WAS, CONSIDERING HE WAS EATING SNOWMEN FROM HIS OWN DIMENSION WHEN I CALLED UPON HIM. THEN AGAIN, MAYBE I DIDN'T WANT TO KNOW, LEST THE PRICE OF LEARNING THE ANSWER WAS BEING HIS NEXT MEAL.

AS FAR AS I KNEW, IT WAS OVER. THE DEMIURGE, IN WHATEVER FORM, WAS DEAD, AND MONOTHEISM WITH HIM, BARRING SOME ODD CASES.

AN ONI MESSENGER FILLED ME IN ON WHERE YALDABUTTAWK ACTUALLY WAS: TRAPPED AS A GHOST, ALONG WITH THOSE FOLLOWERS EATEN ALONG WITH HIM, IN ZINCORCAL'S INTESTINE-DIMENSION. THE ONLY EXIT FROM IT WAS TO THE EAST OF WHERE HE WAS, AND IT WAS BARRED WITH AN IMPENETRABLE BARRIER OF THE WEAPON HE MOST FEARED.



NO! NOT THAT!

IN OTHER NEWS, THE CHICKEN HAD KILLED BRIAN, WHICH EXPLAINED WHY I HADN'T HEARD ANYTHING FROM HIM DURING THE RITUAL, ALTHOUGH I HADN'T BEEN FOCUSING ON HIM EITHER. HIS AFTERLIFE PAPERWORK HAD BEEN FILLED OUT IN ADVANCE, THOUGH, SO HIS GHOST GOT TO BE WITH THE SAME FRIENDS HE'D MADE IN LIFE.



VISITING THE LIVING WILL BE HARDER FOR US ALL NOW!

WE'LL FIND A WAY!

THE CHRISTIANS WEREN'T EVEN IN THE CHICKEN'S HELL. HE'D SENT THEM ELSEWHERE.

THERE WAS A THIRD KIND OF POOP GHOST NOW: THE ONES THE CHICKEN TURNED HIS ENEMIES INTO TO SILENCE THEM, THE ANIMISTIC GHOSTS OF ALL POOP, AND THESE: THE VIOLENT CONFORMIST CHRISTIANS TURNED TO POOP IN BOTH BODY AND SOUL.

THEIR AFTERLIFE WAS A PLANE OF PERPETUAL POOP, BUT THEY DIDN'T MIND, FOR WHAT THEY WANTED MOST WAS A PLACE WHERE EVERYONE WAS LIKE THEM AND ALL THEIR NEEDS WERE CATERED TO FLAWLESSLY.

THEY COULD ALSO FIGHT UNTIL THEY WERE ALL POOP-PULP AND HEAL UP AGAIN THE NEXT DAY.

♪ GLO-O-ORIA IN EXCRETA DEO... ♪

I'M NOT SURE THAT LATIN'S RIGHT... HOW ABOUT I DO THE CHRISTIAN THING AND BEAT YOU FOR TRYING TO CORRECT ME?!



THEY WERE FINALLY HAPPY. THE ONI SEALED OFF THEIR PLANE AND LEFT THEM THERE.

EXCEPT FOR ONE PARTICULAR CHRISTIAN, WHO SHOWED UP IN THE GHOST PLANE IN ONE LAST-DITCH ATTEMPT TO MAKE AMENDS. THE ATTEMPT WENT AS WELL AS YOU'D EXPECT...



MAX! BROTHER OF MINE! I WASN'T ACTUALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR ANYTHING I DID UNDER THE TRINITY OR THE CHICKEN! I SERVED THEM FOR THE GREATER GOOD, AND BY THE TIME I FOUND OUT THEY WERE EVIL, I COULDN'T BACK OUT! YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE ME AND FORGIVE ME! REMEMBER, IF YOU DON'T FORGIVE, YOU SHALL NOT BE FORGIVEN! DON'T TURN YOUR BACK ON ME! IF YOU DON'T FORGIVE ME, YOU HAVE NO MORALS!

GO AWAY. YOU'RE NOT MY FAMILY.

I STILL LOVE YOU! YOU WOULDN'T HAVE GONE THROUGH ANY PAIN OR SUFFERING IF YOU'D JUST ACTED THE PROPER WAY! IT'S YOUR FAULT, NOT MINE!



HE WOULDN'T LEAVE WILLINGLY. AN ONI SECURITY GUARD FINALLY SHOWED UP AND REMOVED HIM.

I DON'T KNOW WHERE HE IS NOW. NEITHER MAX, SUSIE, NOR BRIAN EVER SAW HIM AGAIN. ANYWHERE.

THE HOUSE I GREW UP IN, SO NEAR THE DUNGEON, WAS IN HIS NAME. MOM HAD LOST CLAIM TO IT WHEN THE CHICKEN TURNED HER INTO A BUTT-SERVANT, TO SAY NOTHING OF WHEN SHE DIED. AND HE'D DISOWNED ME WHEN HE'D THROWN ME IN THE DUNGEON. SO THERE WAS NO CHANCE OF ITS PASSING TO ME.

ALSO, THE SUCKING DAMAGE FROM YALDABUTTAWK'S MASS BUTT-MURDER HAD DAMAGED IT ENOUGH TO MAKE IT UNINHABITABLE.

THIS MEANT I HAD TO FIND SOMEWHERE ELSE TO LIVE. THE DUNGEON'S BEING UNDERGROUND SHIELDED IT FROM THE DAMAGE THE HOUSE HAD TAKEN. WITH THE DEMIURGE FINALLY GONE, THE GOBLINS WERE FREE TO MAKE THE DUNGEON A LIVABLE SPACE RATHER THAN A PRISON.

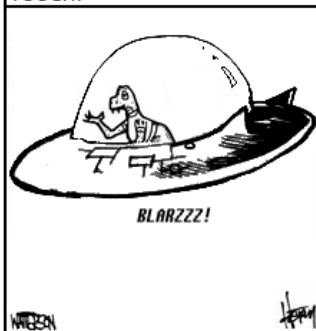


TELL ME MORE ABOUT THESE LAVA LAMPS!

LAMPS WITH MORE AESTHETIC THAN THE USUAL, AND IN A VARIETY OF COLORS!



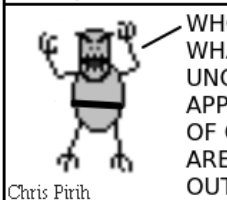
KRALTA LEFT AND FINALLY JOINED THE REST OF HIS PEOPLE. HE PROMISED TO STAY IN TOUCH.



BLARZZZ!

SEBASTIAN AND THE OTHER CEL-YETIS WENT BACK TO THEIR OWN DIMENSION, AS DID THE ELDRITCH ENTITIES ANIMATING MY SNOWMAN ARMY. THER'D BEEN A FAIR NUMBER OF CASUALTIES, WHICH REQUIRED MORE HONORING OF THE DEAD, BUT TAKING DOWN THE DEMIURGE WAS WORTH THE SACRIFICE.

SEBASTIAN PROMISED TO STAY IN TOUCH, TOO.



WHO KNOWS WHAT OTHER UNORTHODOX APPLICATIONS OF CHI THERE ARE? I'LL FIND OUT!

Chris Pireh

I HADN'T HAD MUCH TIME TO GET TO KNOW CLYDE, GIVEN HOW MUCH OF OUR TIME THE WAR HAD TAKEN UP, BUT IT WAS ABOUT TO CHANGE. HE MOVED INTO THE DUNGEON WITH SARANNA AND ME, AND WE ALL FOCUSED ON LIVING LIKE NORMAL PEOPLE. FOR OUR... MORE EXTENSIVE VERSION OF NORMAL.



I FINALLY GOT THE WILDFIRE IN MY SOCK DRAWER UNDER CONTROL!

DARE I ASK HOW A WILDFIRE STARTED THERE?



JPIM DAVES

IT WAS THE END OF MY... OUR FIRST ADVENTURE. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE SO MANY MORE TO COME. THE NEXT ONE STARTED AWHILE LATER. WHEN CLYDE OFFERED TO TAKE US TO VISIT AUNT WALBURGA, WHOSE EXTRADIMENSIONAL EXILE HAD, OF COURSE, ENDED.



I AM NO LONGER ZARB! I AM NOW DIMENSIONALIST GHULZARBIS!

THANK YOU! THE BUTT-PEOPLE SAID THE SAME!

CONGRATULATIONS!



SO WHAT IS THIS OTHER DIMENSION LIKE, ANYWAY? I HAVEN'T SEEN ALL THAT MANY!

I SUPPOSE WE'LL FIND OUT!

I'M GOING HOME NOW!

THE
END...
UNTIL
NEXT
TIME!

JIM DAVIS